WORK AND WIN

An Interesting Weekly for Young America.

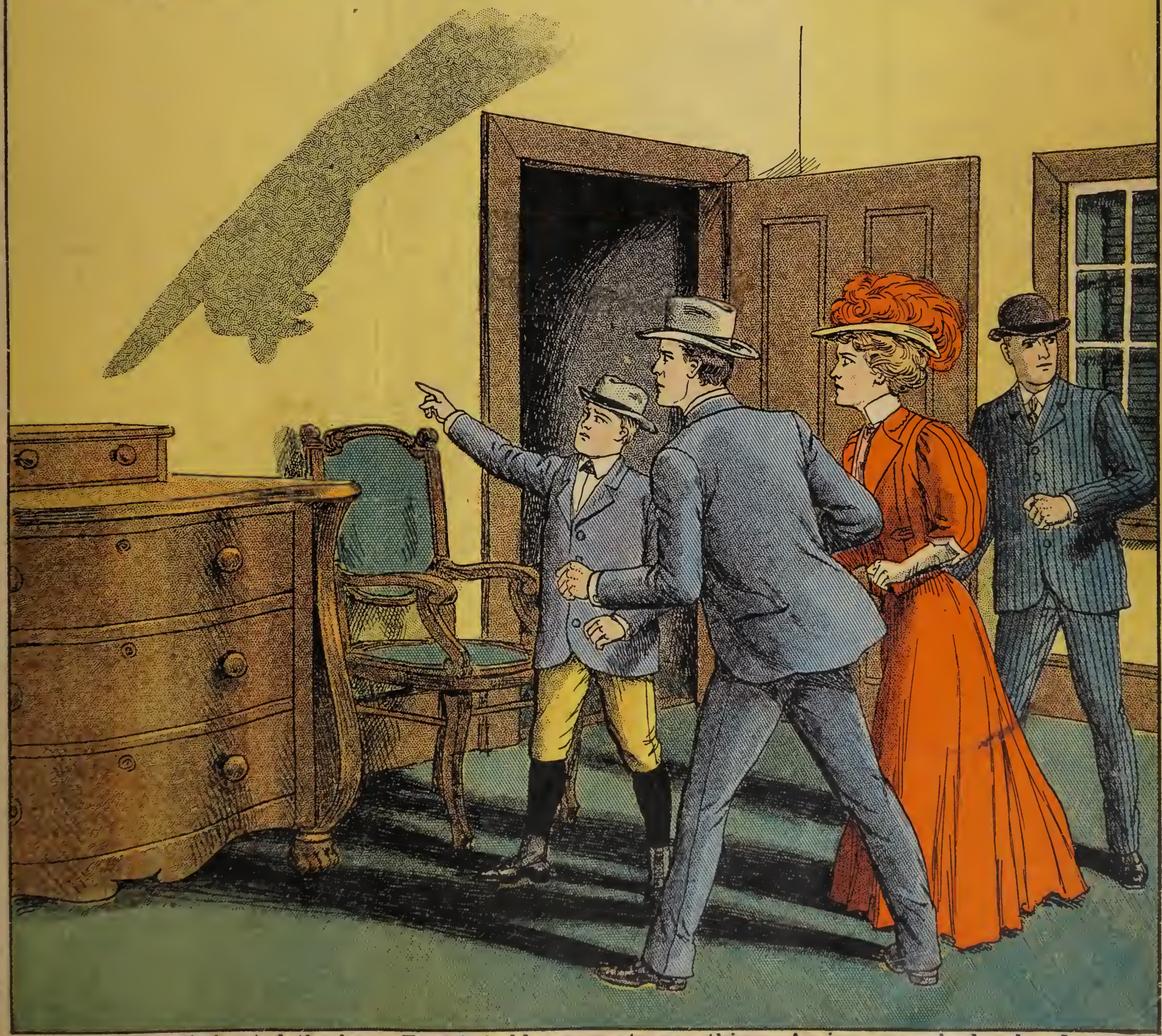
Issued Weekly—By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-Class Matter at the New York Post Office, December 8, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 465. NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 1, 1907. Price 5 Cents.

FRED FEARNOT AND THE SHADOW HAND;

OR, SOLVING A STRANGE MYSTERY.

By HAL STANDISH.



"There it is!" shouted the boy. Fred beheld a very strange thing. An immense shadow hand appeared against the wall, and it pointed right at a drawer in the bureau. It was visible only for a moment and then vanished.

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FRED FEARNOT AND THE SHADOW HAND

OR,

Solving a Strange Mystery

By HAL STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

FRED AND TERRY ON BROADWAY.

Fred Fearnot and Terry Olcott had come down to New York from Fredonia after their return from Newtown, where they had been playing football.

At Fredonia they had met an actor named Leon, who had made a very strange request—that Fred should call on a lady friend of his, who was an actress.

She was a leading tragedienne, well known on the stage as Adele Richford.

Actor Leon had intimated that she was the victim of a very strange plot, or mystery, and the actor insisted that Fearnot was the only man in America smart enough to solve the mystery.

Of course, Fred's curiosity was very great, and he and Terry decided to call on Miss Richford as soon as it was possible.

Fred's parents were away, so he and Terry had full charge at the Fearnot residence. The servants were there, of course, so that they decided to remain until the Judge and Mrs. Fearnot should return.

"Fred," said Terry, "I am really quite interested in this story of Leon's, for it certainly has all the earmarks of a mystery. and the detective instinct is, I think, strong enough in both of us to wish to unravel it."

"Yes, yes, Terry, for it certainly was a very strange affair."

Miss Richford lived at an uptown apartment hotel, and the next day after their arrival in New York Fred and Terry went up to call on her.

But a French maid came to the door and informed them very politely that Miss Richford was out of town, and would not return for some days.

Of course, all that Fred and Terry could do was to leave their cards.

After they left the apartment house they went over to Broadway, and walked down as far as Times Square, and Terry suggested that they go into Rector's for lunch.

They had barely entered the place and seated themselves at a table, when a man of splendid physique, and who sat at the next table, reached over and tapped Fred on the arm.

"Fred Fearnot, or I'm a sinner! Well, this is the greatest pleasure of my life!"

Fred and Terry turned, and both gave exclamations of delight.

"Why, it's Joe Anderson! Hello, Joe! We're glad to see you."

With that, Anderson left his seat to occupy one at their table, and began to deluge the two youths with questions.

"Thunder! You fellows have certainly improved since I saw you last," he said. "Oh, yes; I'm still in the circus business, and I'm going to Maryland to-morrow to join the show. We expect in a few weeks to make a tour of the Southern cities."

Anderson was a very widely known and famous showman and museum proprietor, and Fearnot and Olcott had known him well in the old days, when they were on the road.

The old showman went on then to tell about his adventures since he had last seen them, and finally he asked what they were up to at present.

"Anderson," said Fred, "we are just now spending a little time in the city for our own amusement. We shall not long be idle, for that is not our nature, you know."

"Yes, yes; I know. You fellows are of the lively kind, and it is not natural for you to be idle. I have never forgotten the time you went into the sawdust ring and helped me out when a couple of my best actors were laid up. You are born acrobats, and could make a big thing if you chose to follow up the profession."

"My, my!" laughed Terry. "We wouldn't consider it, Joe."

"Oh, I suppose not. I have heard of your great deals in Wall Street and in the gold mines. I understand also that you ranched it some in Texas."

"Oh, yes; we owned a fine ranch down there. We may acquire another some day."

They chatted a long time with Anderson, Fred ordering a superb lunch, and they fell to observing the people who entered and left the place.

As the restaurant was a fashionable one, a good many of the people were known to Fred and Terry, and some of them nodded to them.

"Great Scott!" said Anderson. "You seem to be known to every one. Now, I have advertised myself in every State in the Union, but I could go into any of these places and never meet any one who knows me, or whom I know."

"Oh, well," said Fred, "you forget that I am a New Yorker, and my father is a judge here. Terry and I have met a good many people all over the country, and for some reason they seem to remember us."

"That is it, exactly. Personality is everything in this world, and you fellows have it in the strongest form. But I don't wonder that you are so popular, for you are always on the square and always prominent figures wherever you go."

"Hold on, Joe," laughed Fred. "Don't throw any more bouquets, or we shall be embarrassed."

Just then a woman, very richly dressed, at a nearby table, was seen to be having an altercation with one of the waiters.

The waiter was quite excited, and he began to brandish his card and mutter in a very threatening way. At first the lady was haughty, and then she seemed to be in distress.

"Hello! Hello!" muttered Terry. "I wonder what the trouble is?"

Just then the head waiter came up, and he also began to argue with the woman. She looked around wildly, and her gaze fell on Fred. Instantly she arose and came forward, saying:

"Oh, sir, I have been robbed of my purse, and I cannot pay my bill. This waiter insists that I do something which it is impossible for me to do, for I have not the money with me, and I am threatened with arrest."

"Madam," said Fred, "you are a stranger to me, but you look fully able to pay any bill you might contract here."

"Oh, sir, I am abundantly able, and I offered to leave my card, but they insist that I pay."

Fred turned to the head waiter, and asked:

"Where is your manager?"

"Sir, he is not in. This lady is a beat, and this is not the first time she has tried the game."

The woman gave a little, hysterical exclamation and sank down into a chair, quite faint. In an instant Fred was on his feet, facing the waiter.

"You cur!" he exclaimed. "You have no right to call any lady such a name unless you have absolute proof."

"Perhaps you'll pay it for her, mister?" said the waiter. "Or she might leave some of them diamonds she is wearing."

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed the woman. "I am insulted! If I may have a chance, I will send to my friends, who will make things right."

"Madam," said Fred, "do not distress yourself further, for I will attend to the score for you, and here is my card. You may remit at your leisure."

Fred took the check and paid it, the amount being about three dollars. The lady took his card and thanked him, with quiet dignity.

At the same time she gave him her own card, saying:

"Mr. Fearnot, your name is familiar to me. I shall not forget your gallantry, I can assure you."

"Madam, shall I not call a carriage for you?"

A man came in answer to Fred's call, and he gave orders that the lady should be driven home, and he paid the man, taking a receipt. Then he bowed very courteously to the lady, who said:

"It gives me pleasure to meet a true gentleman, and you shall hear from me again."

The woman then departed, and Fred walked over to the impudent waiter and took his number, excoriating him sharply. He was humble enough now and said:

"Mister, you mustn't blame me, for this is the great City of New York and impostors come here nearly every day and play a sharp game. They leave their cards and never come back to pay, and the manager takes it out of our pay."

Fred saw that there was reason in this statement, but he said:

"Even if that is true, you should never use impudent or insulting terms. Get an officer or detain the woman; but you have no right to insult her."

Fred then went back to the table, and Anderson said:

"Fearnot, it did me good to see you give it to that waiter. He was certainly insolent."

"Yes, so he was," assented Fred. "Yet I have no doubt that impostors do work games in places like this."

"Say, Fred," said Terry, "I am curious to look at her card."

With that Fred placed the woman's card on the table. The moment he glanced at it both he and Terry gave a start.

"Mrs. Humphrey Lorraine,
"Fifth Avenue."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Fred. "She is a very well-known society woman in the upper circles, and a good friend of my mother, though I have never met her before. I have often heard mother speak of her."

"Well, well," said Showman Anderson. "You did the right thing, Fearnot."

"Oh, yes: but if the manager had been here it probably would not have happened, for he would certainly have known her. I am very glad to have been of service to her."

As they had not finished their course, they lingered some while longer at the table, and just then a messenger came in and asked for the number of a table, which happened to be the one at which they were sitting. The messenger handed Fred a daintily perfumed envelope, and opening it Fred found three crisp, one-dollar bills and a polite note:

"Dear Mr. Fearnot, I shall always appreciate your kindness in coming to my rescue. It was absurd that I should not have credit in that cafe, but I never entered the place

before. I send you the money, which I hope will reach you safely, for I have assumed that you would still be at your table. Again thanking you, I beg to remain,

"Mrs. Humphrey Lorraine."

"There you are," said Fred. "The lady was not an impostor, and I was really able to do her a favor, which gives me great satisfaction."

A number of people at the other tables had witnessed the whole affair, and they had been interested, and a prominent broker, who knew Fred, said:

"Fearnot, I knew that woman was not an impostor, and if you had not paid her score I would have done so."

"Well," laughed Fred, "the pleasure was mine, and that ends it."

"I don't believe so, for she will try to make it up to you, no doubt."

"There is no obligation, and I hope she will not give it another thought."

A little later Fred and Terry and Anderson left the restaurant and they strolled down Broadway. Anderson offered them cigars, but Fred said:

"No, thank you; neither Olcott nor I smoke."

"Great Scott! You are an exception, and I must say I think you miss a great deal."

"We don't think so, Anderson, for we cannot see the pleasure or the necessity of smoking. However, we do not criticize others for the habit, just because we do not smoke."

"Well, I must say I like a good cigar and a nip of whisky once in a while to drive away the blues."

"Our remedy for the blues is plenty of occupation, good, healthy food, and pure, cold water or coffee, if it is rightly made."

Showman Anderson just then called Fred's and Terry's attention to the sign of a sort of museum in one of the side streets, and he said:

"Say, don't you remember Bill Clark, one of the clowns at the time you were with our show?"

"Why, certainly," said Fred. "We remember him well."

"Well, Bill had to leave the show business, so he has drifted up here and opened a side show, and he is doing very well. That is his place, and I suggest we go over and see him."

"All right," said Terry. "I would like to see Bill first rate."

So they walked up to the entrance, and Fred pulled out some money to pay the admittance, but a voice beyond the ticket window yelled out:

"Here, here! Don't take their money! Come in here, all of you!"

The next moment the ex-clown came bounding out, and he fairly embraced each one of them, saying:

"Come 'round to see old Bill, have you? Well, I'm tickled to death to see you, and it brings back old times under the canvas."

"Bill," laughed Fred, "do you remember the barrel trick, and when you got stuck half way in the barrel, and we had to pull you out?"

"Do I? By the Lord Harry, don't I? Fearnot, I don't believe the people ever suspected but that was the right way to do that trick."

"Well, I daresay! When I think of the old circus days it almost tempts me to go back to them."

"Well, none of us are too old. Say the word, and we'll join Joe Anderson here, and tour the country."

"Say," spoke up Anderson, "if you'll do that, I'll have the best ring circus in the United States."

Fred and Terry laughed, and declared that this was not practicable. Then they went through Bill's place, and found that he had really a very good museum, and that the stage show was excellent.

The door had been open but a very little while, and the seats in the little theatre were filling up. Just then the stage manager came out, very much excited, and said:

"Say, Clark, the show is up in the air for to-day. You'll have to give the people rain checks or refund them their money at the box office."

"What in thunder do you mean?" gasped Clark.

"Why, every man Jack of the company has quit and gone out. We haven't even a song and dance artist left, and there isn't time to get word to an agency before the curtain is due to go up."

Quite a lot of people were already in the place, and they were waiting impatiently for the curtain to go up. Bill Clark gasped and held up his hands in horror.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! That will ruin my business here! What shall I do? Hang those scoundrels! I pay them well, but it's all a case of jealousy because each one of them wants to be the headliner! What am I going to do?"

Fred and Terry felt the deepest sympathy for their old friend, and Anderson said:

"Bill, you'll have to go on yourself. You used to be worth the money."

"Joe, I couldn't do a trick now to save my life. Oh, what shall I do?"

The poor fellow wrung his hands and was in great distress, but suddenly Fred asked:

"Bill, what kind of stunts are your artists called on to do? Have you a comedy?"

"My, my, no! They sing and dance, and do acrobatic feats. I had a conjurer, who did tricks with cards and other things, and a ventriloquist. But I haven't time to fill their places."

"I suppose it means quite a loss to you?"

"Oh, yes; several hundred dollars."

"Oh, well," said Fred, "don't turn the people away. How long does the show last?"

"Only an hour, and then there is an intermission of an hour."

"If your bill was filled for this hour, couldn't you get new artists before the next performance?"

"Oh, yes, yes; easily!"

"All right, Bill," laughed Fred. "Here are Olcott and myself and Joe Anderson. I guess we could get up there and hold the audience for a little while. If that will save you, I for one am willing."

The museum proprietor's face lit up instantly, and he fairly whooped with joy.

"Oh, will you? Will you?" he shouted. "If you will

I'll never forget the kindness. Oh, my! What a show that will be, and worth ten times the present price of admission!"

CHAPTER II.

HELPING OUT THE SHOWMAN.

Terry signified his willingness to do a stunt on the museum stage to help Bill Clark out, and Joe Anderson also assented.

Joe was a clever comedian and monologist and was good for fifteen minutes at least.

Fred was a capital ventriloquist, and there were few sleight-of-hand or magician's tricks that he could not do.

Terry was a funny story-teller and comic singer, and as Anderson said, the three of them could easily fill out the hour's performance.

So they hastened behind the scenes, and very quickly made up, and when the curtain went up Anderson was in the wings ready to go on with his act.

Joe gave a very funny talk that kept the audience in roars of laughter, and they encored him repeatedly.

When he went off the stage he said:

"Boys, that is a very appreciative audience and easily pleased. I gave them some jokes that were old when Noah made the Ark."

"Oh, see here, Joe!" laughed Fred. "You are too modest by a long shot. Your monologue was one of the best I ever heard."

"That is good of you to say that, Olcott, but I know that it was very poor."

Bill Clark, however, declared it was the best ever given on that stage. The pianist and the fiddler gave a short selection, and then Fred went on as a magician.

Of course, he could not do some of his best tricks, for he had no time to prepare for them, nor had he the properties necessary.

But he took several packs of cards and made some very puzzling and difficult tricks with them. He also performed some sleight-of-hand tricks that astonished the audience.

He pulled coins out of the air, borrowed a man's watch and pretended to smash it in a bag, and tramped on it. Then he shook the bag and brought out the watch, uninjured and intact.

A man in the audience called out that he knew how the trick was done, and Fred politely asked him to come up on the stage and expose the trick.

"What is more," said Fred, "if you will do it, just as I do it, and without the audience catching on, I will give you ten dollars."

"Mister, I'll take that offer."

The man marched up the little velvet-covered gangway to the stage, and Fred saw at once that he could have a lot of fun with him, for he was chock full of vanity and self-conceit.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," said Fred: "This man has kindly consented to expose to you my last trick, and I am to give him ten dollars if he does so successfully."

With that the audience applauded, and they were very eager to see what the fellow would do.

He threw out his chest and walked out to the footlights and began to make a speech.

"Gentlemen and Ladies," he said: "I am going to show you how the trick is done, for it's only a very simple trick, and I will prove to you that there is a lot of fakin' business in this sort of thing. When you see him put the watch in the bag, you must watch very closely, for he uses a watch of his own, and the other watch he throws up his sleeve."

"Hold on, there!" called out a man in the audience. "That's dead wrong, as I can swear, for he has his sleeves always rolled up."

"Mister," said the would-be magician, "if he don't throw it up his sleeve he throws it into his pocket, and that is about the same."

"Well, let's see you do it, then!"

Fred saw that the fellow was a bluff, and that he knew absolutely nothing about legerdemain, and he decided to have some fun with him. So he stood back and smiled at the audience, and waited.

He gave the fellow the bag which he had used in performing the trick, and now the fellow said:

"If some gentleman in the audience will let me take his watch I will show him how the trick is done."

With that the man who had let Fred have his watch passed it up again.

It was a very handsome silver chronometer, and the would-be magician held it up, and then he began, in a rambling way, to explain the trick.

He held the watch up and dropped it in the bag. Then he showed the mouth of the bag as being open, and he rolled the bag up, as Fred had done, and he said:

"Now, when I roll the bag up, I really take the watch out in my palm this way, so that it really is not left in the bag. Then I jump on the bag and the watch apparently. I take this heavy hammer and proceed, as you will think from my actions, to pound it all to pieces. But the truth is the watch is never in the bag, but in my hand. Finally, I put my hand in and draw out the watch unhurt. Now I will do the trick."

As a matter of fact, Fred did not do the trick that way at all, for he used a dummy watch, made of wood, and this was in a lower compartment of the bag.

So, when the would-be magician dropped the watch in the bag and in rolling it up abstracted it again, he really took out the dummy watch, which he held in the palm of his hand.

Of course, he couldn't look at it, so he dropped the apparently empty bag to the floor and proceeded to jump and stamp on it.

His heels encountered an object in the bag, and the crash of glass and mechanism was heard plainly. But he didn't notice this, for he was sure he had the right watch in the palm of his hand.

He chuckled and whistled gleefully, and he said:

"This watch won't be much good to the owner when I get through with it."

Then he took the sledgehammer and pounded the bag furiously. Then he arose, smiling, and, picking up the bag, held it up.

"Friends," he said, "you can see what I have submit-

led the watch to, and you can readily imagine what a condition it would be in if it had been in the bag all that time. As a matter of fact, it was not, but was in the palm of my hand. I will now show you."

He took up the bag and put his hand into it, and pretended to draw out the watch, but instead he held up the dummy.

"Will the gentleman please come for his watch?" he said.

But every one stared at the dummy, and he now looked at it himself. He gave a gasp and drew it back, looking at it closely, and he ejaculated:

"Good Lord! This isn't the watch. What is the matter?"

"No," said the owner of the watch, angrily. "What do you mean? I want my watch back in good condition."

"My friend," stuttered the fellow, "your watch is all right," and he began to search for it in the bag. Of course he expected to pull it out intact, but instead he pulled out the damaged watch, and such a shock as it was to them all. The man's watch was unrecognizable, for it had been hammered into a mass of metal.

Of course, there was an uproar. The owner of the watch got up in his seat and demanded his watch.

Fred went down to the footlights, and said:

"Friends, it seems that our friend here has not quite mastered the trick yet, in spite of his assertion. I am sorry for the owner of the watch he borrowed."

Of course, at first the audience thought it might have been only a clever little trick invented for the occasion, but the would-be magician was badly scared, and he turned to look for an exit. He was trembling like an aspen.

"Mister," he said, in a low tone, to Fred, "I slipped up on that trick. Help me out, won't you? Let me out behind the scenes?"

"No, sir!" said Fred, firmly. "You have made a fool of yourself and you have spoiled the man's watch, and the only thing for you to do is to admit it, and pay for the watch, like a man."

"Great Scott! I'll do that; but he will want to punch me afterward."

"Oh, I guess not, and, for that matter, I'll see that he doesn't."

With that Fred went to the footlights and explained that the magician was only an amateur, and that he had slipped up on his trick, but that he was willing to pay for the watch if the owner would be satisfied.

"Well, he is a fool!" said the owner of the watch, angrily. "Of course, I can't do anything different, but I'd like mighty well to take it out of his hide!"

So the would-be magician paid for the watch, and then he went out, very much discomfited. It was pretty evident that he had his conceit greatly lowered.

Fred then went on with his exhibition, and he won much applause. After he went off Terry went on, with his funny stories and several comic songs.

Terry made a big hit, the audience applauding wildly and giving him many encores. Finally the curtain went down, and the people filed out, very well satisfied with the show.

Bill Clark was delighted, and he was also very grateful. He said:

"You fellows have done me a favor I shall never forget, for you have pulled me out of a big hole. It would have been a bad thing for me to have let the day's performance go bad, and I now have new artists ready to go on for the next turn."

"Clark," said Fred. "We've had lots of fun out of it, and if we've helped you we're glad."

"Well, you have, and more than I can express in words. I shall not forget the kindness. How long will you be in New York?"

Fred answered that this was uncertain, but they thought of remaining some little time yet.

"Well," said the showman, "I would like to have you dine with me."

"Bill, that would be a great pleasure, but we have just dined and we could not stand another dinner just yet. We will be around and see you again, and we wish you the best of luck."

Fred and Terry and Showman Anderson walked out to Broadway, and then they parted with the circus man.

They shook hands warmly, and Anderson said:

"I hope to see you fellows on the road again. I am going to Maryland to join my show, and I only wish you were going with me."

"Joe," said Fred, "we would really like the fun of a few weeks under the canvas, but it would be out of the question at present."

"Oh, I know. You have some large enterprises on hand always. Well, I wish you success."

They parted with the showman, and then Fred said:

"Terry, if we only had the time to spare we would take a little tour with Joe and his circus, for there is certainly excitement and fun in the life."

"Yes, yes. But it is hardly practical at present. Say, we really agreed to call on Adele Richford, and I suppose we ought to do so. Perhaps she is at home now."

Just then they were passing the entrance of a theatre and a couple of finely dressed women came out of the lobby. They passed very close to Fred and Terry, and several words spoken by them were quite audible.

"Miss Richford," said one of the ladies, in quite a sharp tone, "I am not the least bit superstitious, but, really, your experience is the most uncanny I ever heard of."

"Miss Foster, it is getting on my nerves, and I shall surely be ill if I do not get an explanation soon."

The ladies then passed by, but both Fred and Terry looked after them, and then they looked at each other.

"Great Scott! Did you hear what those ladies said, Fred?"

"Indeed I did, and I believe that one of them is Miss Richford, the very person we are looking for."

Fred acted on impulse, and he turned around and, walking up to the two ladies, he lifted his hat very courteously and asked:

"Pardon me, but is not this Miss Richford?"

The two ladies stopped and the one Fred had addressed looked at him sharply and said:

"That is my name, sir. What is your business with me?"

With that Fred gave her his card and also the note of introduction, written by the actor Leon. Miss Richford read the note and her face lit up at once, and she said:

"Oh, I am charmed to meet you, Mr. Fearnot. Your name is very familiar to me. This is my friend Miss Foster. Mr. Leon, I see, speaks of you in his note as being willing to assist me in the solution of a very strange mystery."

"Miss Richford, Mr. Leon interested me greatly in the story, and I promised him I would call on you and perhaps give you all assistance in my power."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Fearnot. I have heard a great deal of the kind deeds for which you are noted, and it is an honor to meet you and reckon you an acquaintance."

"It is also an honor to meet the very distinguished Miss Richford," said Fred, gallantly.

"My, my! I can see that the stories of your extreme gallantry toward our sex are not exaggerated."

With that Fred then turned and introduced Terry.

The famous actress seemed very strongly impressed with both Fred and Terry, and she engaged in a pleasant conversation with them, and then she said.

"I am sorry I was not at home when you called, but if you will come to my apartments now I will tell you all I know about the most uncanny and strange mystery I ever knew."

"Mr. Fearnot," said Miss Foster, "if you can unravel the mystery you can do more than the best Secret Service detectives in the United States have been able to do."

"Oh, well," laughed Fred, "I can make no rash promises; but I am interested and I will do all I can."

Miss Richford then stated that they were soon to close the season at the theatre they had just come from, and she added:

"You know, Mr. Fearnot, my role is that of tragedienne. I shall play Lady Macbeth, and I have just come from a rehearsal."

"Miss Richford, it will give us pleasure to see you in that part. I know that you will be a success."

"Well, Mr. Fearnot, I think I could succeed if it was not for this awful thing that haunts me day and night. If I am alone it appears to me. Sometimes I wake up in the night, and it is on the wall in fiery red. In the daytime it is a strange shadow, the likeness of a human hand, with the index finger always pointing at some object. What makes the phantom and why it pursues me is the very great mystery."

Fred was greatly interested.

"That is indeed strange," he said. "But, of course, there is a natural explanation for it."

"Oh, I presume so; but I can't really regard it as a natural phenomenon. It is too weird and too uncanny. Yet I don't know what to make of it."

Fred called a four-wheeled cab and all four entered it, for Miss Foster lived with the tragedienne. They were then driven to the apartment hotel.

They went up in the elevator to Miss Richford's rooms. They were very richly furnished, and there were objects of art scattered about.

The actress had Fred and Terry make themselves easy, and she brought out a samovar and brewed tea for them. The atmosphere of the actress' rooms was aesthetic and refined, and Fred and Terry saw that she was not an ordinary person.

Fred saw the picture of a very good-looking man on the wall, and he asked who he was.

"Mr. Fearnot," said the actress, in a strange voice, "he was my husband, but he is dead. Before he died I was happy. Since then I have merely been a slave to my art."

Fred saw at once that there had been a real tragedy in the life of the noted actress.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW ON THE WALL.

After the tea was served the beautiful actress leaned back in a sumptuous chair.

"Mr. Fearnot," she said, "I am comparatively a young woman, being a little over thirty, but I have lived ten lives in one. I have been guilty of no life of debauchery, or of excesses, but I have seen and tasted the dregs of the cup of life."

Fred gazed at the woman in a penetrating way, and he tried to fathom her nature. He saw refinement, delicacy and good breeding, but there were exotic tastes, indicating that she was luxury loving.

From his present view point Fred was ready to assume that the strange mystery of which she spoke was an outcome of this sort of life she had led. But he said:

"Miss Richford, I wish you would now tell me in detail your strange experiences. I will then let you know whether I can help you or not."

With that she narrated in a more explicit way her experiences. She described the strange shadow hand which appeared to her at different times. It appeared always against a surface, like the wall of the room or a building.

"It is simply an intangible shadow," she said. "I can see no natural cause for it. I have had it appear to me in my dressing room. Since it has begun to appear to me I have had the worst of luck. My play has failed; my trusted manager decamped with all my funds; I fell downstairs and injured my hip; in fact, a dozen misfortunes have come to me, and if I was superstitious I would ascribe it all to the shadow hand."

"Miss Richford," said Fred, "has it occurred to you that this may be the scheme of a rival or an enemy to do you harm?"

"Well, if that is the case, tell me how that mysterious shadow hand is made to appear to me?"

"I am not prepared to say, but chemistry and optical illusions are sometimes employed in most wonderful fashion. I should say, though, that your enemy is a scientist or a person skilled in the use of chemicals."

"My, my! Is it easy to produce a shadow hand that will haunt any one and appear to them at strange intervals with chemicals?"

"Well," laughed Fred, "that is certainly a hard question to answer, but if I were forced to answer it, I would say it is quite possible."

"Goodness gracious! I would like to know the trick," laughed the beautiful actress. "I have several jealous rivals whom I would frighten out of their shoes. Mr.

Fearnot, the life of a popular actress is not a bed of roses, for she is subject to jealousy and hatred, and her rivals stand ready to pull her down and destroy her."

"Exactly," assented Fred. "Perhaps the originators of this illusion of the shadow hand have that object in view."

"They expect to break my nerves, and put me out of business?"

"Yes, yes; that is it, exactly."

"Well," said Miss Richford, with an ugly smile, "they will have a good time trying it. I am all alone in the world, for my husband is dead, and I have only the stage life left; but I don't propose to give it up for the trickery of some mean, jealous rival. Old Nick himself couldn't force me to give up my profession."

Fred asked who were her possible rivals, and she named four actresses whose names were prominent.

"Any one of those women would like to see me dead and buried," she said. "They hate me bitterly."

Fred jotted down their names, and then he asked other questions. Finally he said:

"I hope it will be my fortune to see the shadow hand, for I think I could then judge as to whether it is a fake or some strange, psychic phenomenon."

"Do you believe in psychic phenomena?"

"Well, to some extent. Most of the processes of Nature have a psychic foundation; and, in fact, all the best things of life, in thought and deed, are blended with a psychic force. It is a something which our minds are too limited to grasp. It is that element which puts life in the body and governs most of our natural senses; and, in fact, might be called the Great Mystery! Nobody knows what psychic mystery is."

"Mr. Fearnot, that is very interesting, and our minds are the same. I can see that you are a deep student and a philosopher."

"Madam, I am neither. I am just a practical and simple investigator of unexplained facts. There is nothing under the sun that cannot be explained, and I tell you this psychic question will be some day."

The famous actress declared that she hoped the mysterious hand would appear when Fred was present some time.

Fred continued his questioning, and he took many notes, jotting down everything that could have a possible bearing on the strange case. Then he said:

"Miss Richford, I shall take my leave now; but I hope that something will develop soon."

"Oh, I can't tell you how grateful I am to you, Mr. Fearnot, and I feel as if I had a champion or a friend on whom I could call."

"You can be sure of that, madam. I am at your command."

Fred and Terry now took their leave, and when they reached the street Terry spoke up:

"Fred, there is a lot of queer business about that woman's story. I want to see that shadow hand first."

"Well, Terry, I have considered all sides, and I have weighed her as an impostor, and as a credulous person, or the victim of an hallucination. But, I tell you, there is something to her story."

"Thunder! I believe it is all a lot of moonshine!"

"Terry, you have no right to say that till you know it for a fact."

"Well, I'm not such a fool as to let her draw me into such a fake, and I propose to stay out of it."

Fred was thunderstruck, for he had never seen Terry in this frame of mind before, and he said:

"All right, Terry. You can stay out of it, if you choose; but I am going to stay right in it till I have the whole matter settled."

It was not often that Fred and Terry quarrelled, but for once Terry was like a mule, and he insisted that the actress was an impostor, and that it was all a game to draw them into a serious scrape.

"Fred, I beg of you to drop the matter and have no more to do with it. No good will come of it. I tell you it is all a fake."

In spite of all efforts, Fred could not shake Terry's conviction, and finally he said, angrily:

"Hang it! You are too obstinate for anything, Terry, so go your way, if you want to. I am going to solve this mystery, and I certainly have faith in Miss Richford!"

Then the two boys did something which they had not done before for a good while. They actually got real angry, and Terry declared he was going to Fredonia on the morning train.

Fred invited him to do so, saying, in a haughty way:

"Go up there, and stay there till I have solved this mystery, and then we perhaps can agree on something else."

"It's pretty hard to agree with you when you get your mind set one way," retorted Terry. "You simply won't listen to reason."

"See here, Terry, I'm not altogether a fool!"

"Well, you're going that way as fast as you can."

"Oh, take care now! You and I can't have trouble, you know."

"No, and the best way to prevent it is for you to go your way and I'll go mine!"

With that, Terry started off alone, and Fred gazed after him, astonished and greatly pained.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed. "I never thought that of Terry Olcott! I supposed he would be only too glad to go into this investigation with me."

Fred was tempted to call Terry back, but he didn't do so. He turned and made his way to Fifth avenue and to the Fearnot mansion.

Terry was not there when he arrived. The servant said he had been there and got his effects, and left.

Fred felt as if the props had gone from under him, for he was very dependent on Terry, and he would think of undertaking no enterprise without his chum Terry.

"Oh, well," he mused, "he will come back. He may be a little bit touched, or disappointed; but Terry Olcott isn't the kind to hold a foolish temper."

However, Terry did not come back that night, and Fred felt somewhat touched. But he arose the next morning, saying:

"Well, I guess I can work the puzzle out alone. At any rate, I'm going to try it."

So he went over to see Miss Adele Richford, and he

found that she was just getting ready to go to drive. There was a boy and a young man with her. One of them was her nephew and the other a distant cousin.

The boy's name was Clyde Harrison. The youth's name was Harold Lane. Little Clyde was all animation, and he attracted Fred's attention at once, for he was a bright lad.

Miss Richford introduced Fred to the boy and the youth, and she said:

"Mr. Fearnot, Clyde Harrison, the boy you see over there, is my little nephew. The youth is Harold Lane, and a nobler young fellow never lived."

The actress then asked Fred to go to drive with them, and she added:

"Mr. Fearnot, my nerves are getting weak, and I am going to get the change, and if possible throw off this shadow hand affair. If I don't succeed I shall break down."

Fred asked if the hand had appeared to her, and she said:

"Yes. When I went to retire last night it appeared on the wall of my room. It remained there a long time, and I got no sleep."

"That is strange! Where are you going now?"

"Well, we are going to drive out to Kingsbridge. There is a country house to let out there, and if it is what I think it is, we shall move out there, for I am tired of living in the city."

Fred was very much interested, and Miss Richford asked him to enter the carriage and go with them. So Fred got into the carriage, and they were driven away.

In due time they reached Kingsbridge, and they drove up onto the heights and paused before a large, square country house. The windows were open, and there was a musty smell in the air.

This was the house of which Miss Richford had spoken, and they descended from the carriage and went up the walk to the front door.

"Mr. Fearnot," said the actress, who was in a very nervous condition and quite pale and trembling, "I can rent this house all furnished, and I think it will make a fine home for us while I play my engagement in New York. Harold takes a juvenile part in my play, and Clyde goes to school."

"Mr. Fearnot," spoke up Clyde, "I hear you are a great fighter."

"What is that?" laughed Fred. "Who told you such a thing as that, Clyde?"

"Oh, I have read about you, and how you have fought Indians and outlaws. When I grow up I am going to be like you, and go out West."

"Mr. Fearnot," laughed the actress, "you can see what your example has done."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Fred. "I think you may change your mind when you get older, Clyde, for that is a pretty hard life."

"Please tell me all about life on a ranch?" pleaded the boy.

Fred promised to do this later, and now they entered the house. It was a very comfortable country house, and furnished very well.

They went from one room to another, and Clyde clung to Fred's hand. He was a very talkative little fellow.

"Mr. Fearnot, I hope you can help auntie to find out what the shadow hand is. I have seen it, and it makes me afraid."

"Clyde," said Fred, "it probably will not trouble you here."

"If it does not," said the actress, hopefully, "I shall be the happiest person on earth."

Just then they entered a room, and Fred saw a chair and a bureau near the door.

They had barely crossed the threshold when the actress gave a gasping cry and started back. Then Fred was dumfounded at what he saw, for Clyde pointed at the wall in terror.

"There it is!" shouted the boy.

Fred beheld a very strange thing. An immense shadow hand appeared against the wall, and it pointed right at a drawer in the bureau. It was visible only for a moment and vanished.

Fred did not lose his nerve, though the apparition staggered him a little. He ran up close to the wall, and then looked around him.

There was no explanation of the apparition. Fred opened the drawer of the bureau, but there was nothing there.

By this time Miss Richford had recovered, and she said, huskily:

"Mr. Fearnot, you saw it?"

"Yes, yes," said Fred. "Very plainly."

"Well, what is it?"

"Indeed, I am not prepared to say," declared Fred. "It is certainly very strange. I can see no natural cause, nor any trick, either. But I am going to unearth the mystery."

Fred went to each window and looked out.

No one was in sight. He could see no way for the shadow to have been projected from outside the house.

"By George!" he muttered. "That is a real mystery!"

Fred examined the bureau and the wall. He went carefully about the room examining everything.

"Mr. Fearnot, is it a ghost?" asked little Clyde.

"Nonsense, my boy!" said Fred. "It is a very curious thing, to be sure; but there is no ghost about it."

"Mr. Fearnot," spoke up the actress, "it is of no use for me to come out here to live, for I do not escape that thing. It haunts me, and it will be my death!"

Fred spoke soothingly to the nervous woman, who, in fact, was almost in hysterics.

She sat down tremblingly, and said:

"I shall have to give up my engagement. I can't stand the strain. Why, I saw the thing on the wall of my dressing room one night."

Miss Richford then and there decided not to take the house.

The agent now came in. He had been having the place renovated, expecting she would take it.

But she said:

"It does not suit me, and I am going back to the city. If I am going to be haunted it might as well be there as anywhere."

"Miss Richford," said Fred, "I don't believe there is anything supernatural about the phenomenon, and it will be explained before long, I can assure you. Pay no heed to it, for it does not seem able to do you bodily harm. I will solve the mystery, or I will never do anything else."

"Oh, but it is a shock to my nerves, and I don't know what I am going to do."

The youth, Harold, came over to Fred and asked if they had not better go back to the city.

"Mr. Fearnot," he said, "Miss Richford would be more timid here than in New York, where there are lots of people."

"Yes, it is the best plan, Harold," said Fred. So they went back to the carriage and were driven back to New York.

When they reached Miss Richford's apartments she was in a highly nervous state, and it became necessary to call in a doctor to give her a quieting potion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN FROM THE BOWERY.

Fred was completely mystified, and he had not a single clew to the strange mystery. Of course, he was disposed not to give it up, but to solve it.

His one regret was that Terry had not been with him, for he would have been convinced then that the story was not a fake, and Miss Richford was not an impostor.

Fred tried to reason the thing out in a logical way, and he muttered:

"Miss Richford has an enemy. That enemy may be a hypnotist or a wizard, and have some secret trick of producing the shadow hand; but I can't see how the trick is done."

Fred knew that all magician's tricks were simple, when once explained, and the same could, no doubt, be said of this one. But it was very puzzling, to say the least.

The more Fred tried to arrive at a logical explanation through deduction, the more puzzled he became.

After he left Miss Richford's apartments Fred went home. Terry was not there, of course.

Fred felt very much disturbed over Terry's conduct, for it was the nearest they had ever come to a quarrel. He couldn't understand why Terry had left him in such an apparent fit of bad temper.

But Fred was easy going and also forgiving, and he muttered:

"Oh, well, Terry always was quick tempered. But he will come around all right."

Fred got a letter from Evelyn at Fredonia, saying that every one was well up there, and the boys were greatly missed.

"Dear," wrote Evelyn, "as soon as you finish your business in New York I do hope you will come back. Everybody is inquiring for you, and it is very dead here when you and Terry are away."

"Bless her sweet heart!" muttered Fred. "She can't know how much I long to be with her all the time; but there are important matters which call me away."

After dinner Fred went downtown and transacted some very important business. All the while, though, the very strange mystery of the shadow hand was before him.

Fred finally left the office of the law firm which he had been visiting and which was in lower Broadway, and he strolled aimlessly up the great thoroughfare, and when he reached City Hall Square he was in a very abstract mood, and he did not notice that he had crossed the square and was wandering along on Park Row.

Suddenly, a man whose appearance was very beggarly touch him on the arm and said:

"Boss, can I speak a word with you?"

Fred looked at the fellow, who had a bad face, and he was about to shake him off when the fellow opened the palm of his hand and showed a very handsome diamond brooch. In an instant Fred saw it was valuable.

"Boss," whined the fellow, "I've just made a find, and you look like a man who would know its real value. I don't dare go into the jewelry shops, for they'll swear I stole it and have me arrested."

Of course, Fred recognized the game as that of the professional fence, and that the fellow would no doubt offer him the brooch for a small part of its real value, and he said:

"See here, you scoundrel! Where did you get that?"

"Mister, I swear I found it in the gutter in front of Sherry's. Of course, some rich woman dropped it getting into her carriage. I am a poor man, and I've got to live."

"Let me see it," said Fred.

He looked at it, and saw that it was easily worth several thousand dollars. He said:

"Don't lie to me. You want to sell this to me?"

"Boss, I'll do anything to get a square meal. Give me what you want to for it. I don't dare carry it any longer, for fear I'll be arrested."

"What will you take for it?"

"Oh, anything! Five dollars! I must have a square meal."

Instantly Fred's opinion changed.

"Do you mean to say you'll sell that to me for five dollars?"

"If it's too much, make it three. I'm starving, I tell you!"

"Do you know its real value?"

"Oh, maybe a hundred dollars. But I could never get its real value."

Fred looked at the man sharply. He saw that he had a very bady face, but he realized that if he was really a cunning thief he would never sell the valuable brooch for such an absurd amount.

He asked him where he found the brooch and a great many more questions, and satisfied himself that the man had told the truth and that he had really found the brooch, as he claimed.

He gave his name as John Rodman, and he said:

"Boss, I'm not so bad as I look. I know I've led a dissipated life, for I've been a hard drinker, but I never stole a penny, and I never did any man an injury. It broke me down when my wife and little ones died, and I've never been the same man since. I lost my property through rascality, and when a man once gets down every man's hand is against him. I tell you, it is pretty hard to be called a thief, as you have just called me."

"Rodman,," said Fred, "it is a very common game in this part of the city, for the thief and the fence are on every street corner."

"Yes, yes; I know. Give me back the pin, and I'll go along."

"Wait a minute. Do you mean you will really sell this pin for five dollars?"

"I'll be glad to get anything for it, for I'm starving!"

"Well," said Fred, "you can do better than that. Advertise it in the newspapers, and no doubt the owner will pay you a large reward. The brooch is easily worth two thousand dollars."

"Boss, how could I pay for an advertisement? If I went into an office they'd throw me out."

"Oh, well, I'll do it for you."

"Will you do it, and take the cost out of the reward money?" asked the fellow, eagerly.

"I will do so, and turn the balance over to you."

"God bless you, sir! You have a kind heart. I've not met a man like you for years. Oh, your words make me happy, I can tell you!"

"Wait a moment," said Fred. "Come into this restaurant, and I will see that you have a dinner."

The poor vagabond pulled off his cap, and tears rolled from his eyes. He seemed to regard Fred almost with reverence.

"Boss, do you mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"It will a surprise to my stomach, for all I've had for ten days is crusts of bread I have picked out of ash barrels."

"Ugh! That is is a pretty hard life," declared Fred. "But come with me."

They were about to enter the restaurant when the manager stepped forward and bowed obsequiously to Fred, but he caught Rodman by the shoulder, and snapped:

"Get out of here, you bum!"

"Hold on," said Fred. "He is with me, and I am going to give him as good a dinner as you have."

"Sorry, sir; but our patrons will object to him, for he looks as if he would steal a man's shirt off his back."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well," said Fred, and he and Rodman went back to the street. The poor fellow was in tears.

"Boss, it's no use, for I tell you every man's hand is turned against me, and I can never get up."

"Oh, hold on," said Fred. "If you could look in a glass you'd be distrustful of yourself. You certainly look pretty tough. To a certain extent the dress is the man, and I am going to ask you to stave off those pangs of hunger long enough to get a new suit of clothes."

"Good Lord! Didn't I tell you that I hadn't a cent of money, boss?"

"Oh, well, I can advance it to you out of the reward you will get for the return of that brooch to its owner."

"Boss, we haven't found the owner yet, and we're not sure of the reward."

"I'm willing to take chances, and you ought to be."

"God bless your kind heart again, sir!"

With that Fred led the way into one of the cheap clothing stores in Park Row, and he ordered a good suit of clothes for the vagabond.

Then he led him into a barber shop and insisted that he should be shaved and washed and his hair cut.

After that he took him into a shoe store and purchased new footgear for him.

The transformation was wonderful. Rodman acted like a man in a dream, and his eyes shone like diamonds, and he seemed like a new man. In the shoe store Fred told him to look in the glass, and Rodman was dumfounded.

"Great snakes!" he gasped. "I don't know myself. Give me a chance now, and I'll never get back into that awful state again."

"Now," laughed Fred, "let us go back to that restaurant, and see what the manager says."

With that they walked back up the Row, and presently once more entered the restaurant. Instantly the manager came forward politely and gave them both seats and called a waiter.

He looked at Fred as if he remembered him, but he certainly didn't remember Rodman, for, without his beard and his unkempt hair, he was certainly a different-looking individual.

"Great Scott!" gasped Rodman. "When a man is up in the world everything comes his way."

"My friend," said Fred, "it depends largely on one's own self whether he keeps up or not. Now, it is probably your fault that you got down. It is quite the fashion for men when they get down to give up utterly, and blame their condition to hard luck."

"Boss, you've taught me a good lesson. I'll never forget, and I'll never forget you."

"All right, Rodman. Here is my card. You will know where to find me. I will take the brooch and advertise it. As soon as the owner is found I'll see that you get the reward."

Then Fred put a ten-dollar bill in the vagabond's hand, saying:

"Get out and look for work, now, and you will get it. Make a man of yourself, Rodman."

The poor chap was completely overwhelmed. He grasped Fred's hand and swore that he would never forget him.

"You've given me a new start in life," he said. "I'm a new man from this moment."

Then Fred took his leave of Rodman. He went right over to Newspaper Row and inserted an advertisement in the daily papers of the finding of the brooch.

Fred went home that evening and he placed the brooch in his safe and then dismissed the matter from his mind.

He went to bed that night thinking of the mystery of the shadow hand, and he had very strange dreams. The next morning he arose and went over to see Miss Richford, but she was attending a rehearsal.

The boy, Clyde Harrison, was there, and he wanted Fred to come in and give him some boxing lessons.

"Clyde," laughed Fred, "why do you want to learn to box?"

"Mr. Fearnot, I was over on Seventh avenue, the other day, and I saw a big boy picking on a little one, and if I

had known how to box I would have given him the licking he deserved."

"Good, good!" said Fred. "I can see that you have the right spirit, for you would only use your knowledge for the defence of, and not the oppression of, the weak."

"Mr. Fearnot, that's what I want to be a fighter for, for I hate to see any one picked on."

"All right, my boy," said Fred. "Have you any gloves?"

"Oh, yes, sir! My papa, when he was alive, had a set of them, and he was a boxer."

Clyde led the way in, and he produced the gloves. Fred saw that they were a splendid set, and he put on a pair and little Clyde did the same.

The little fellow danced up to Fred in a very plucky way and began to lead and to spar quite cleverly.

"Very good! Very good, Clyde!" said Fred. "I see you have already had some instructions."

"No, sir. What I know I have picked up myself."

"By George! You do very well, I must say, and it will only take a little experience to make a splendid boxer of you, only you do not lead right."

Fred showed him a better and safer way of leading, and then he showed him a number of clever tricks, and he said:

"When you see that young bully next time you can easily give him a knockout."

"Oh, I hope so, Mr. Fearnot, for he deserves it."

Clyde was delighted with his instructions, and he thanked Fred very heartily. Fearnot then took his leave, saying he would call later.

He walked down Broadway, and he called on a number of acquaintances, and just as he was ascending the steps of the Fearnot mansion, in Fifth avenue, a little later, a carriage drove up, and a richly dressed woman alighted.

She came up the steps and, seeing Fred, asked if Mr. Fearnot lived there.

"I am Mr. Fearnot, junior," said Fred. "Do you wish to see me?"

"Well," said the lady, "here is my card. I lost a valuable brooch at Sherry's some time ago, and I saw an advertisement in this morning's paper, which convinces me that it is the one I lost."

Fred glanced at the card and read:

"Mrs. Burden-Potter.
"No —— East Seventy-fourth Street."

"Madam," said Fred, "a brooch was found in front of Sherry's. It was found by a poor East Side vagabond. It may be your property."

"Oh, yes. Of course, it may have been stolen, but I rather think I dropped it in going to my carriage."

"I am quite sure this poor fellow did not steal it." said Fred.

"May I see the brooch?"

"Madam, I would rather the finder would deliver it to you in person, for reasons you can understand."

"Oh, yes. I am willing to pay five hundred dollars reward."

With that she gave a perfect description of the pin, and Fred said:

"It is your brooch without a doubt. I will call this afternoon with the finder, and it shall be delivered to you."

The lady thanked Fred, and then drove away.

Fred then went into the house and got his lunch. He looked over his mail, and, to his surprise, he found a note, which read:

"Dear Fred: I have a clew, and I will be at the house this evening. Yours, Terry."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Fred. "That beats me! What in the world has Terry been up to?"

But he was delighted to know, though, that Terry had not left New York, and that he was still interested in the mystery.

Fred now sent a messenger to the address of John Rodman, at a lodging house in the Bowery, asking him to come up as soon as possible.

An hour later Rodman appeared, and he was very eager and excited.

"Rodman," said Fred, "I have found the owner of the brooch, and she is willing to pay you a generous reward. I insisted that you deliver the pin to her personally, and she is waiting at her residence."

"Mr. Fearnot," said Rodman, "you're the best friend I ever had! Will you go with me?"

"Oh, yes, if you wish."

Fred went in and got the brooch, and handed it to Rodman, and then they took an uptown car and, getting off at Seventy-fourth street, they went to the residence of Mrs. Burden-Potter.

It was a very elegant residence, and as they ascended the steps Rodman said:

"Mr. Fearnot, I shall feel very much out of place here, and I wish you would do the business for me."

"Cheer up, Rodman," laughed Fred. "The lady is very pleasant and you need not fear her at all."

Mrs. Potter came into the room where they were, and Fred advanced to meet her courteously, saying:

"Madam, this is the man who found your brooch, and his name is John Rodman."

"Yes, yes," said the wealthy woman, pleasantly. "Well, he is an honest man, and I shall reward him well."

CHAPTER V.

CLEWS COME FAST.

"Madam," said Rodman, "it is very kind of you, but I ask no reward."

"Let me see the brooch, my good sir, and we will see about that later."

Rodman handed her the brooch, and at sight of it she gave a very loud exclamation of joy.

"Oh, yes, yes!" she said. "It is my pin, and I am very glad to get it, for it is a pin my good husband game me."

She then turned to a desk and very quickly wrote a check and handed it to Rodman, saying:

"Here is five hundred dollars. If it is not enough, I pray you tell me so."

Rodman was stunned, for to him it was a very large sum of money, and he looked like one in a dream. He

tried to stammer his thanks, saying it was too much; but the rich woman laughed and said:

"All right, my good man. It is very little, and I am glad to get my pin back, I can assure you."

Just then, though, the woman suddenly stopped and gasped, and turned deadly pale. She reeled back, exclaiming:

"Oh, oh! It has come again! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

She pointed to the wall, and there Fred and Rodman were aghast to see the mysterious shadow hand. It was pointing to a picture on the wall of the woman's husband, who had been dead many years.

She sank into a chair, weak and trembling.

Fred rushed up to the wall, and then he looked around for an explanation of the phenomenon, but there was none to be had.

Of course, he was greatly astonished and mystified, for he saw that Miss Richford was not the only victim of the mysterious apparition.

Just then the shadow disappeared, and a couple of servants came rushing in to attend to their mistress. She was quickly revived, and then Fred, who was, of course, interested, said:

"Madam, this is not the first time you have seen that strange shadow?"

"No, no!" she answered. "It has haunted me for a year past. It has cost me thousands of dollars, and I supposed it was gone, never to return. Oh, my nervous system is almost ruined!"

"Madam, you are not the only victim, I can assure you."

"Is that true?"

Fred then told of Miss Richford's experience. Instantly the woman of wealth was interested, and she became very much excited and asked all sorts of questions about the experience of the famous actress.

"Mr. Fearnot," she said, "I did believe it was a supernatural appearance, but now I can see the possibility of a swindle."

"Madam, it is the trick of some villain, though what his purpose is I cannot understand."

"I think I can understand in my case, for I have paid out over fifty thousand dollars to be free from the haunting presence of that awful hand."

"Goodness gracious! To whom did you pay this money?"

"To a certain clairvoyant, named Madam Frochard, who has rooms in West Twenty-third street."

"But I do not understand. Why did you pay her the money?"

"She came here one day to call and solicit my patronage. While she was here the hand appeared. She then made claim that she could dispel the apparition forever through her occult powers. I listened to her persuasions and paid her large sums of money from time to time. It was the only way I could free myself from the thing, though it would return after an interval."

"Then, her occult powers did not dispel the apparition effectually?"

"It has not seemed to," said Mrs. Potter. "I am now convinced that there is a swindle concerned, and I am going to call in the police."

"Wait," said Fred, quietly. "I request you not to do so as yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Madam, I am engaged myself in the unraveling of this mystery in behalf of Miss Richford. Your experience has given me a clew, and I believe I can soon bring the guilty party to justice."

"Sir, if you can do that I will pay you any reward."

"Mrs. Potter, I am not working for money, for I am by no means a poor man myself. I am interested in the mystery, that is all."

"Well, Mr. Fearnot, I am one of the victims of the shadow hand who will be very grateful to you."

"All right, Mrs. Potter. I ask you to keep quiet and wait results. I think they will soon come."

Fred and Rodman then took their leave. When they were once more on the street the man from the Bowery said, eagerly:

"Mr. Fearnot, that is a very great mystery, isn't it?"

"It seems to be, Rodman."

"Well," said Rodman, "I think I can help you solve it, for I do know that there is a band of crooks on the East Side who call themselves the 'Brotherhood of the Shadow Hand.' Peeler Maguire and Sandow Smith are the leaders, and they are engaged in some mysterious game that no one has been able to solve yet."

"By George! Is that true, Rodman?" asked Fred.

"Yes, every word of it."

"Murder will out," muttered Fred. "We are picking up the threads now, and the clews are coming in fast. Rodman, are you willing to help me?"

"You bet your life I am, Mr. Fearnot, for you have made a man of me."

"Well, Rodman, I am going over into the Bowery by and by, and I want you to show me those crooks, Maguire and Smith."

"Fearnot, I'll put you on their track, for you made a man of me, and I'll never forget it."

"All right, Rodman. I guess we will soon succeed in solving this very great mystery of the shadow hand. I am beginning to see daylight already. In my opinion, this clairvoyant is in it, too; and it is a pretty game of blackmail."

"That's what it is. I will go over and locate Smith and Maguire now, and you will find me this evening at my lodgings."

"All right, Rodman; I feel that I can trust you."

"You can, Fearnot, for I am true."

"What are you going to do with the five hundred Mrs. Potter gave you?"

"I am going to put it in the bank. I am going to work and earn more, and you'll never see John Rodman down on his uppers again."

"Good for you, Rodman! I have great faith in you."

Rodman then separated from Fred, who was determined to visit the clairvoyant in Twenty-third street. He reckoned it best to follow up every clew as quickly as possible.

The more Fred thought it over, the better satisfied he

was that it was a very deep confidence game, and that Mrs. Burden was not the only victim of it.

No doubt the gang had some mechanical appliance which they used to create the illusion of the shadow hand. The rest of the game was worked very shrewdly by the clairvoyant, Madam Frochard.

Fred found the clairvoyant's office and he rapped on the door, and a weazened-faced girl answered and said that the madam was out.

Fred went away, somewhat disappointed, but he was determined to call again.

He decided to go up and see Miss Richford, and so he went uptown and called at her hotel. He was shown to her apartments, and took a seat in an outer chamber. Pretty soon he heard voices, and the words were barely distinguishable. He heard a very soft, low-toned voice say:

"Miss Richford, it is a supernatural visitation, and only a psychic mind can dispel it. For five hundred dollars I will invoke my powers to dispel it, and assure you it will never come again."

"I will call upon you."

Then the door closed, and the famous actress came in and bowed, saying:

"Mr. Fearnot, I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

"Miss Richford, pardon my rudeness, but may I ask who your visitor was?"

"Certainly! She is a famous clairvoyant, known as Madam Frochard."

"Oh, I see. Is she accustomed to visit you?"

"Dear me, no! I never saw her before to-day in my life. But, do you know, while she was here that horrible hand appeared again. She at once explained, quite plausibly, that it was a supernatural manifestation, and that she could dispel it by her psychic powers."

"Oh, yes; and she asks a large sum of money from you for doing it."

"Mr. Fearnot, did you overhear her?"

"Well, yes; I did. But I want to tell you about a very wealthy woman, whom she swindled to the tune of many thousands of dollars."

Fred then told of Mrs. Potter's experience with Madam Frochard, and of the great sum it had cost her. Of course, Miss Richford was horrified.

"My, my!" she said. "That puts the matter in a new light at once. It seems that it is a swindling game, then?"

"So it is, Miss Richford. I am going down to call on Madam Frochard as soon as I leave here. I think I need not warn you to have nothing to do with her."

"I shall not, assuredly. My! If it is proved that it is the work of crooks and they are captured, I shall be a new person."

"You can be pretty sure that it will, Miss Richford."

Fred chatted with the famous actress a while and then he took his leave.

Fred went straight back to Twenty-third street and to the rooms of Madam Frochard. When he entered the same weazened-faced maid greeted him, and she said:

"Madam has returned."

"Good!" said Fred. "I hope you will tell her that I want to see her. Here is my card."

Fred had made up his mind not to let the clairvoyant know what the real object of his visit was, but to lead her into a trap, if possible. He was convinced that she was a very shrewd woman, and that he would not have the easiest kind of a time.

He was ushered into a room which had a skylight, and the walls were covered with gilt stars against a background of blue. There were all sorts of weird objects in the room from a human skeleton to a stuffed owl, and bats hung on wires from the ceiling.

"Great Scott!" thought Fred. "This is enough to give a superstitious or credulous person the horrors."

But Fred took a seat and in a moment a figure came in at a door opposite. It was veiled, and a low, musical voice said:

"What would you have, friend? Do you wish to know of the future? Is it of your fate, or do you wish to communicate with friends beyond?"

"Madam," said Fred, "I came simply to have you read my palm."

"Then follow me."

Fred followed the woman into a room beyond. It was furnished sumptuously, and as Fred looked about he felt almost as if he was in the home of a millionaire.

He sank into a rich chair and then the woman threw off her veil and looked at him sharply. Her eyes were very soft and her manner catlike.

She was very beautiful, and as Fred looked at her he saw that she had the power to charm men.

She came up to him in her very soft way, and asked to look at his palm. Then she looked into his face, and Fred felt her hypnotic power.

Instantly he set his will against it, at the same time saying:

"Madam, you cannot overcome me. My power is greater than yours."

The woman looked Fred straight in the eye, and said:

"Who are you?"

"My name is Fearnot."

"A very good name, sir. Why have you come here?"

"I had heard of you, and I wanted to test your powers," said Fred, evasively.

"Oh, you come here for amusement, do you?" she said, sharply. "My time is valuable, and I have customers who are waiting."

"If I detain them, I may, perhaps, do them a kindness."

"Will you explain?"

"In other words, they will be spared the infliction of your little game of deception. We understand each other."

The woman's eyes gleamed like those of a tigress, and she glared at Fred and, clenching her hands, said:

"My friend, I am not given to trifling, and I warn you against it. Why have you come here?"

"To see you."

"Well, is that all?"

"No," said Fred. "Having seen you, I propose to destroy you!"

Madam Frochard, with a catlike hiss, sprung to her feet. She reached for a bellcord, but checked herself.

She drew a deep breath and then her mood changed, and she laughed.

"You are clever," she said. "You are jealous of my powers. Come, let us be friends. What is your game?"

"Madam, my game is to wind up your criminal career, and that of the gang you are in league with."

Then Madame Frochard's manner changed, and she sprung to a shelf and caught up a revolver. She was breathing heavily, and her eyes blazed like stars.

"You are a detective?"

Fred smiled, and then he arose, holding up his hand and saying:

"Put up the weapon! You can't use it here, and you do not need defense, for I am not going to do you personal injury. No, I am not a detective by profession, but I am interested in this little game of mystery you are playing with a couple of crooks known as Peeler Maguire and Sandow Smith."

Then the clairvoyant turned deadly pale, and she stared at Fred like an animal caught in a trap. She did not speak for a moment, and Fred studied her carefully.

He saw that she was a wonderful woman, being, in fact, like a beautiful snake. He felt the cold fascination of her presence, and if he had been less powerful of will it might have overwhelmed him.

But he smiled and went on:

"Madam, this is no doubt a surprise to you, for very likely you have never dreamed that your game was known."

"Sir," said the clairvoyant, " I don't know what you mean. I don't know the persons you name."

"Of course, your falsehood does not deceive me," said Fred. "In fact, there is only one thing that will save you from twenty years or more in prison. Think of it!"

"I defy you!"

"Don't do that, for you can't afford to. If you will make a clean breast of it all, exposing the trick of the shadow hand, I will see that you escape."

The woman's face was immobile, showing that she had perfect command of herself.

"You are a madman! I don't know what you are talking about. My business here is legitimate. I know nothing about the matter of which you speak. At least, I am not connected with it. You have no grounds for complaint against me, for I have always conducted my business within the law."

"One moment," he said, coolly. "I ask you if Mrs. Burden-Potter has not paid you large sums of money to rid her of the supernatural apparition of the shadow hand?"

"Mrs. Potter is one of my clients, and I advise her on a great many different matters. It is a business proposition, and she has had much assistance from me."

Fred saw that he could force nothing from the shrewd woman, so he changed his tactics.

CHAPTER VI.

FRED MEETS TERRY.

Fred now became more cautious and diplomatic, and he changed the subject, as if he considered it of no further importance, and he proceeded to converse with the clairvoyant pleasantly on other topics.

She seemed surprised, but answered his questions, and finally she took a step forward, and said:

"Mr. Fearnot, why have you come here, and why do you accuse me of these terrible things?"

"Madam," said Fred, "I wished to satisfy myself if they were true or not. It was very hard for me to believe it of a woman so beautiful, and seemingly so innocent."

The arrow struck home, in spite of the shrewdness of this keen woman of the world, and she smiled in a dazzling way and came forward, eagerly, saying:

"Mr. Fearnot, you are too noble and too kind to make trouble for a poor, defenceless woman, who is trying to earn an honest livelihood in this big city."

"Oh, I do not wish to make trouble for you, but to save other people trouble," said Fred.

"I see! I see!" said the clairvoyant, in a soft, purring way. "You are anxious to serve the beautiful actress. You love her!"

"You are mistaken," said Fred. "That is not true."

"But you are putting yourself to a great deal of trouble for her. Ah, I am not easy to deceive and I am not blind! Men will do much for a sweetheart."

"You are quite wrong," said Fred. "She is nothing to me, nor never can be, for I have a sweetheart, who is fairer and sweeter than she."

"Oh, then you're not heart and fancy free?"

"I am true to my own sweetheart."

"Mr. Fearnot, is she fair, and does she love you well?"

"In my eyes she is the fairest of all, and she is as true as true can be."

The woman sighed and then she smiled, and, coming nearer, looked into Fred's eyes. But he was proof against her hypnotic power, and she said:

"You are not an easy subject. You have also hypnotic force."

"Madam Frochard," said Fred, "the greatest hynotist in the world failed to influence me, for I have a very strong will, and I am not easily moved."

"I see! I see! I have not the beauty or the power," she said. "But I could love you, for you are noble and strong! I would be your slave gladly—I would worship you!"

"Great Scott!" thought Fred. "This is getting too lively for me, and I think I had better pull out." But he added:

"Madam, I advise you to centre your affections upon a more deserving subject, for I could never be anything to you. I could never even be your friend unless you would consent to expose the mystery of the shadow hand."

The woman grabbed Fred's arm and began to beg and plead with him not to believe that she was connected with the Shadow Hand gang.

"Mr. Fearnot," she said, "I have nothing to do with them, and I assure you that I am innocent of it all."

Fred was disgusted with the woman's duplicity and falsehood, and he saw that he could do nothing further with her, so he drew away, and, bidding her adieu, he left the place.

Once Fred was out on the street, he had opportunity to consider matters, and he muttered:

"Perhaps it was unwise in me to show my hand to her. But it would have been known sooner or later. I wonder what Terry has learned? I wish I could see him."

Fred did not forget his appointment with Rodman that evening, and he hoped that it would lead to some revelation. He was not wholly satisfied with the way things had turned out, and he went home somewhat disappointed.

When he entered the house he saw Terry's hat on the rack, and he went eagerly into the next room, and there was Terry, who ran up and shook hands with him, saying:

"Hang it, Fred! It was foolish in me to act the way I did the other day, but I was so sure that woman was making a fool of you that I simply couldn't help but express my feelings."

"Oh, that's all right, Terry; but I tell you it was no joke. I have had some pretty exciting experiences since I saw you."

"Well, I've had a few," said Terry. "Of course, I had no idea of going to Fredonia. I simply took a look around on my own account, and I hit on a few clews."

With that Fred told his experiences, and then Terry exclaimed:

"By George! What you have learned is of double value now, for what I learned will add to it."

Then Terry told of his having seen a man in Third avenue kicking a poor bootblack, and how he had knocked the brute down, and taken the part of the street boy.

The little fellow had then declared that he was very much afraid of the man, because he was one of the Brotherhood of the Shadow Hand.

Of course, Terry was interested right away, and asked the boy enough to become satisfied that the mysterious shadow hand was only an agency used by a gang of crooks to extort money from nervous victims.

"As soon as I learned that," said Terry, "I made up my mind that I was wrong and you were right, and I sent you a note that I had made a discovery of importance. I have ever since been trying to find out where the Shadow Hand is located, and who the leaders are."

"Terry, I'm mighty glad you didn't go to Fredonia, for I need your help the worst way. We must work together."

"Well, we most always win when we do, Fred."

"That's right, that's right, old pard. We've got to hang together."

"As long as we live, and that will be past eighty, barring accidents, I guess."

"Terry, when I am eighty years old I hope to be as supple as I am now."

"So do I. I would rather be a spry old man than a rheumatic old cripple, who can't get out of his chair for gout."

"Exactly! Our method of living insures us that, Terry."

Fred then told Terry that he was to meet Rodman that evening, and they were to go out looking for Maguire and Smith, the leaders of the Shadow Hand gang.

"Fred," asked Terry, "when we have found the rogues what will be do with them? We haven't evidence enough to arrest them."

"Oh, well, we can get the evidence, I guess. Quite enough people have been victimized by the Shadow Hand, I guess, to make it easy to convict them of blackmailing."

Fred and Terry then went down to the evening meal. After that they again discussed the affair freely, and Terry declared:

"Fred, I have changed front entirely. I am very much interested in this matter now, and I want to see this strange mystery exposed."

Just then a servant brought in an evening newspaper, and Fred took it and glanced at a heading and gave a start.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "What is all this? Read it, Terry!"

Terry took the paper and read:

"Great Mystery in Society Circles—The Phenomena of the Shadow Hand—Best Detectives About to Undertake the Solution of This Mystery, Which Is Believed to Be the Greatest Blackmailing Fraud in the Country!"

Then followed a long and quite garbled account of Miss Richford's exciting experience with the Shadow Hand. The newspaper ended the article as follows:

"Nobody knows whether the mysterious Shadow Hand is a supernatural manifestation or the result of some mechanical trick. If either, it is a very wonderful thing. It is believed, though, that a certain clairvoyant in town has reaped a fortune from incredulous and easy people, by pretending to rid them of the ghostly apparition by means of her occult powers. However this may be, the writer fails to understand how this can be done."

More followed, but these were the salient points, and Fred said:

"Well, Terry, what do you think?"

"Fred, we've got to expose that fake, and that's all there is to it. It has fooled the people."

"It has fooled them just as long as it will, Terry. I'm going to see the matter cleared up. This newspaper account has not helped matters any, for it has simply put the gang on their guard."

"Fearnot, do you expect to break up this blackmailing gang at once? It looks to me like a long siege."

"Terry, I don't want to break up any honest enterprise; but this certainly is not one."

"That's right, and I'm with you, heart and soul."

The two boys soon left the house to keep their appointment with Rodman. When they reached the lodging house where Rodman lived the landlady said that he had left the house for a day or two to go up the river on a trip.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Terry. "What do you think of that, Fred? I thought you considered him an honest man?"

"Hold on, Terry! He is honest, or I am a sinner!"

Fred was thoughtful for some moments, and he thought over what the landlady said, and then an idea came to him.

"Terry," he said, "it's a trick—it's all a trick!"

"What on earth do you mean, Fred Fearnot?"

"Rodman is all right. He has done this to cover his tracks, for the gang probably are onto him. He has not gone up the river, but as soon as we get away from here we will find him."

Fearnot's theory proved correct, for they were not a block away from the house, when an arm reached out of a doorway, and beckoned them.

"Hello! Hello!" exclaimed Fred. "What's all this mean?"

With that Fred stepped boldly up to the door, which belonged to a tenement, and he pushed the door open. He stood face to face with Rodman, who was blood-stained and had a bandage over his head.

"Rodman!" gasped Fred. "What on earth is the matter?"

"Mr. Fearnot," said the man from the Bowery, "I have just escaped what seemed certain death. The gang are onto me, and they mean to kill me!"

"Great Scott, Rodman! Who are they?"

"Oh, Maguire and Smith and some others. They believe I exposed some of the secrets of the gang, and they have laid for me."

"Say, you look as if you had been roughly used."

"Well, I guess I have been! You should have seen the awful fight I had. But I held them off, and, although I got badly smashed, I am not dead—I made my escape!"

"You were lucky, Rodman."

"Indeed, I think I was, for I do know that they meant to shut my lips forever. You see, I have proof of their identity, and I now know just why certain things are so."

"Rodman," asked Terry, "do you really know the secrets of this blackmailing gang?"

"My, my! I ought to, for I have lived with them, and know each man personally, though I was never a party to any of their crimes."

"Well, Fred," said Terry, "here is the man we want, and he can certainly help us to round up that gang."

"I certainly can do so," said Rodman, eagerly. "I would like to see every one of them hanged!"

"Rodman," asked Fred, "are you afraid to accompany us?"

"No, they will not dare to attack me while I am with you. I did not dare to go back to my lodgings, though."

"All right. Come with us."

Rodman emerged, and he walked down the street with Fred and Terry. He pointed out an Italian restaurant of the cheaper class, and said:

"That is Tony Sperotti's place, and they hang out in there most of the time. You can no doubt find Peeler Maguire and Sandow in there now, eating."

Fred at once led the way to the entrance to the Italian restaurant. He opened the door and they passed through a narrow hall.

In the room beyond was a bar, and there were tables, at which sat a great number of men and women, eating and drinking.

It was a Bohemian resort of the lower class. Nobody seemed to heed the newcomers, and Fred and Terry and Rodman sat down at a table, and Fred ordered plates of spaghetti for all three.

When it was brought they proceeded to eat leisurely, for it was really very good.

"Rodman," said Fred pretty soon, "do you see our men here anywhere?"

The man from the Bowery glanced around and then he gave a start.

"There they are, with those two women," he said.

Fred and Terry looked over to a table across the room, and they saw two rather shrewd-looking men at a table with a couple of women. They were drinking wine and talking earnestly.

"Gentlemen," said Rodman, "the men are not the only crooks at that table. The women are worse than they are. One of them is a pickpocket and the other is a shoplifter."

"Oh, I see," said Fred, quietly. "They certainly look it."

"But I don't think they have anything to do with the Shadow Hand. They are not members of the gang, for they are all men."

The fellow whom Rodman pointed out as Sandow Smith was a giant, so far as physical development went, for he had enormous shoulders and great, bulging muscles.

"Fearnot," said Rodman, "he is a professional strong man, and used to travel with a show. He can break an iron bar in his fingers, and twist horseshoes and do all kinds of wonderful feats. He would be a bad man to run up against."

"Oh, yes," said Fred. "He would be bad at close quarters; but he is not at all dangerous to a scientific boxer or wrestler."

"Fearnot, why is that?"

"Well, those strong men are strong in a certain sense. Their muscles are bound, though, and not flexible. The toughest man in the world to handle is the man with loose muscles that do not show through the skin at all."

"By George! I know that is so, for I met a larky chap once, who was like a panther, and no one could whip him."

"Exactly. The loose, rolling muscles are the best for endurance and real strength. The man with tight, hard muscles may do very well on a dead lift, but he is muscle bound, and can only depend on his strength at certain angles."

Just then, a man at a table behind them began to swear and pound on the table, and call the waiter filthy names.

The proprietor of the place came running up and requested him to be more orderly. The fellow, who was full of wine, snarled a savage reply and hurled a heavy mug at the proprietor.

It struck him over the eye, and he went down, while blood spurted from the wound. Instandly there was an uproar.

Everybody sprung up, and several men ran forward to take the part of the injured man. The assailant, who was insane with wine, then began hurling plates and dishes all over the place. People were struck by them, and confusion reigned.

The result was that several men ran in to seize the perpetrator, but he was powerful and he knocked two of them down.

Then others mixed in, and in about a minute a terrific fight was in progress, and it was pretty lively in the Italian restaurant.

In one or two cases stilettos flashed, but fortunately none were used, and a moment later the police came scrambling in.

Fred saw Smith and Maguire going out by a rear entrance, and he said:

"Terry, let's us go that way, too."

Fred and Terry made a dive for the back entrance, but Rodman got caught in the crowd. When Fred and Terry got outside they saw Maguire and Smith rushing through a narrow passage, and they followed them.

Suddenly they came into a court, and here they halted, breathless, and Sandow paused, swelling out his chest, and saying:

"Let 'em come on, mate! I'm all ready to give them a bear squeeze."

"I guess you won't get the chance, Sandy," laughed Maguire. "Geewhiz! Here is some one."

But Fred and Terry, also out of breath, called out:

"We're not cops! We're all right! Don't fear for us!"

"Oh, say," called out Fred, "where are we?"

With that, Maguire peered at them closely, and then he made a queer sign with his fingers, and asked:

"Are you Brotherhood men?"

"What Brotherhood?" asked Fred, in apparent innocence.

"Oh, it's a little society we have formed for social intercourse, and also to protect our interests in many ways."

"Well, I guess we don't belong," said Fred. "I think it must be a good thing, though, and if there is anything we can do to help you it will be a pleasure if you will call on us."

The speaker peered into Fred's face, and then nodded and said:

"You are all right, as I can see; we trust you."

"Good!" said Fred. "Now let me know all about this brotherhood business. Perhaps I'll join."

"Boss, you can't, for the membership is limited. Seems to me you're pretty fine birds for this part of the town and I suppose you are slumming?"

"Well, yes," said Fred, accepting the fellow's explanation, quickly. "But we had no idea of running into a scrape."

"Well, I guess you're all right. How would you like to sit in at a card game, just for a little diversion?"

"Well," said Fred, glancing at Terry, "we are not averse to it, though we are both very poor players."

"Oh, I've heard that before," laughed Maguire. "The worst fleecing I ever got was from a fellow who didn't know the game at all."

"That must have been beginner's luck!" laughed Terry.

"It surely was! Oh, a man can always do a thing well at first."

With that, the two crooks came nearer, for it was plain that they regarded Fred and Terry as easy and legitimate prey. Maguire pushed open a door and led the way into a dark hallway in a ramshackle building.

Fred and Terry followed, not without some misgivings, and the next moment they were in a room, which seemed dark, but Maguire pressed a button and there was a flood of electric light.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Fred. "You seem to be very well acquainted around here."

"Oh, yes," said Maguire. "We ought to be, for this has been our stamping ground for a good many years. Everything is all straight and safe here, and you have no need to worry."

Smith closed the door, and Fred saw that he locked it.

He exchanged glances with Terry, but there was nothing in the manner of the two crooks to indicate treachery or a trap.

Smith also closed the inside shutters, and then he said:

"I reckon no Peeping Tom kin look in on us, and we're dead safe here. Now, mates, let's see your passports!"

"That's right," said Maguire. "It's proper to show credentials, you know."

"What's that?" demanded Fred.

"Why, you ought to know. Ain't you a Brotherhood man?"

"No; I am not."

"Oh, see here. You're something or other or you wouldn't be hanging around this part of the town."

Fred saw what the villains were up to, and he nodded and laughed:

"Oh, sure! We're from Chicago, and this is a new graft for us. But we hope to make good in New York. Seems to me the Shadow Hand is the real thing down here."

"Boss, you're talking," said Sandow. "Kin you make good?"

"I don't know," said Fred. "Give us a chance."

"Oh, we'll do that, all right. Git out the cards, Peeler, and let's have a little game."

With that Maguire wheeled a card table into the centre of the room, and then he placed a greasy pack of cards on it, and he next went to a closet and pulled out a bottle of vile-looking whisky and some glasses.

He placed the bottle and the glasses on the table, and he called out:

"Come on, gents! Here's to success!"

The other crook filled a glass, and then he shoved the bottle toward Fred and Terry, saying:

"Fill up, mates!"

"You'll have to excuse us." said Fred. "Neither of us drink."

The two crooks stared.

"What! Ye don't drink whisky?"

"No. We don't drink any kind of liquors," said Fred.

"Thunder! That's queer! What do yer drink, anyway?"

"Oh, good, cold water, or sometimes coffee, if it is well made."

The two crooks looked at each other, and whistled, and then Maguire leaned over and peered into Fred's face and asked:

"Say, boss, be you on the level?"

"Oh, well, that's for you to find out," said Fred, coolly. "I don't believe you are taking any more chances than we are."

"Mister, it sounds kind of queer, for I never heard of a sensible man who didn't drink good whisky."

"Well, now, you see one," said Fred, very coolly. "I don't reckon on doing anything I don't want to. Come on, Bill," to Terry; "let's get out of here, for it is pretty plain that we are not wanted."

Fred moved toward the door, but Maguire called out:

"Oh, say! Hold on, pards! It's all right, and we don't want to have any trouble. Sit down and have a game."

"That's right," put in Sandow, wriggling into his chair. "Of course, we don't care what a man's religion is, or his taste, either, so long as he is on the level."

Fred saw that the crooks were anxious to play, so he looked at Terry, who said:

"Friends, we'll play a friendly game with you, and then we'll go, for we have a little business of our own to do."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CROOKS' DEN.

With that Maguire seemed interested, and as Fred and Terry sat down to the table, he asked what the job was, saying:

"Gentlemen, I hope you won't think I'm curious, but maybe you are in a line of business that might hit me some time and I might put something in your way."

Of course, Fred knew it was policy to make the two crooks think that he and Terry were cracksmen, so he began to intimate very broadly that they had a safe-blowing job on hand. Then Maguire was interested, and he asked all manner of questions.

But Fred was shrewd enough to keep him guessing all the while.

In fact, Fearnot and Olcott played their parts so well that the two crooks were completely fooled, and they at once proceeded to make themselves bon camarade with their two guests.

In fact, the Peeler became very garrulous, and he betrayed some facts that interested Fred and Terry very much. One concerned the Shadow Hand, and hinted at the great profit which it yielded.

Fred gave Terry a comprehensive glance, and he knew that all that was necessary now was to learn the secret of the phenomena, which he had already guessed was mechanical.

But the card game progressed, and the two crooks began to win. The stakes were small, but Smith and Maguire seemed to be as anxious to win as if they were higher, and Fred and Terry both saw that they were resorting to a tricky game.

In fact, there were very few trick in cards that Fred and Terry did not know, and it was easy enough for them to see through the simple tricks used by the crooks.

But they allowed them to win, for the sake of policy, until finally Fred said:

"Pards, I'm done, for I'm broke; you've got my bundle."

"Is that so?" said Maguire, very much elated. "Well, we'll have another sitting to-morrow night. You'll win it all back then."

"Say, I've taken a shine to you," said Maguire, in a very familiar way. "You're decent chaps, and I want to keep up my friendship with you. I'll give you the open sesame here. Six slow raps and two quick ones. You'll find us here every night about this time."

"Mate," said Smith, "these gents are all right, and we might speak a good word for them in the brotherhood."

"Oh, hold on," said Fred. "Wait till you know us better. What's this brotherhood, anyway?"

"Mate," said Maguire, "we're pulling a good thing out of it, and we're going higher every day. We expect to hit the millionaires soon, and they will settle for hundreds of thousands or the Shadow Hand will haunt them to their graves!"

"Say, what in thunder is this Shadow Hand, and how is it done?"

"That's one of the secrets of the brotherhood, which can't be revealed till you are a member."

Fred, of course, did not want to appear too anxious to join, so he continued to ask all kinds of questions, and pretty soon he had gathered a good deal of information. Then he said:

"Well, if it's a good thing, that's what we're looking for, and if you want us, we'll consider coming into your brotherhood."

"Pards, we want just such chaps as you, and we'll propose your names at the next meeting, if you say so."

"Well, you can if you want to. My name is Jim Lacy, and this is my pard, Bill Story. We're ready for anything that has the color of the yellow in it."

"That settles it! We'd drink to it, but you won't take whisky."

"No, but we'll propose a toast for luck, just the same."

With that Fred proposed a very clever toast, which delighted the two crooks.

They had taken a great fancy to Fearnot and Olcott, and Maguire asked them where they were stopping.

"Oh, we never stop at the same place twice, for it is safer to keep moving around."

"Well, make your headquarters here, and you'll be safe, and you're always welcome."

"Thank you," said Fred. "We'll consider that."

Sandow now came up to Fred and held out his hand, saying:

"Pard, have you got a good grip?"

"Oh, pretty good," said Fred. "I guess you are pretty strong."

Sandow grinned and asked Fred to take his hand.

"Pard, don't you do it, for he'll crush it," said Maguire. "He has a grip like steel."

Fred pretended to hesitate, but finally he laughed and said:

"Well, I've got a little bit of a grip myself, and I'll go you one."

With that, he took Sandow's hand, and the strong man at once set his muscles to squeeze Fred's hand into a pulp.

Of course, he thought it would be easy; but the next moment he received a great surprise, for he found that the grip on his own hand was closing up like a steel vise.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed. "You have got a little bit of a grip, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes; a little one," smiled Fred. "Is that the best you can do?"

Maguire was astounded, for he saw that his pard was beginning to grow red in the face, and he tried to free the grip Fred had on him.

Pretty soon he began to double up and writhe, and he gasped:

"Oh, my, my! Leggo! Oh, such a grip! You're spoiling my hand!"

"Oh, well," laughed Fred, "I don't want to do that, so I'll let go. I'm very sorry if I have distressed you."

The crook rubbed his hands in agony, and he groaned:

"Oh, Lord! Lord! I never suspected you had such strength, and I believe you have spoiled my hand."

"Great Scott!" said Fred. "You are a strong man, and I am only a youth. You ought to be able to squeeze me into jelly."

"Oh, yes; but I don't see where you get such a grip. My hand feels as if there wasn't a bone left in it."

Maguire was very much astonished, and he looked at Fred, in a puzzled way, and declared that he couldn't believe it. He asked Fred if he was otherwise strong.

"Well, I am fairly strong," declared Fred. "I guess there are stronger men."

"See here. I'm something on the wrestle myself, and I'd like to try it on with you for a round."

"I'm not much of a wrestler," said Fred. "My friend Story, here, is better at that, for my game is the boxing game."

"Oh, ho! Sandow is a boxer, only you don't want to let him hit you fair, for he'd mash you like a fly."

"Oh, I wouldn't let him hit me," laughed Fred. "If we had gloves I'd be glad to give him a go."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Sandow. "I have two sets of gloves, and we might as well have a little sport."

Fred declared that he was willing, and Maguire promptly challenged Terry to a wrestling bout.

Of course, Terry was delighted, for he was itching for the chance, as he was never so happy as when in a ruction of some kind, but he said:

"See here, I'd rather put on the gloves, for my friend Lacy is the best wrestler."

"Don't you believe it," laughed Fred. "Story can twist me into knots on the mat. Look out for him, pard."

Maguire eagerly pulled off his coat and shirt and tightened his belt. He could easily pass for an athlete, for he had powerful muscles, and Terry saw that he was likely to give him some fun. Sandow offered to wrestle the winner.

"Hold on," said Fred. "I'm in it, too. We might as well make it a round robin."

"All right," assented the strong man. "We'll let them settle their match first, before we box, for the room is small."

Sandow had brought out a couple of pairs of very good gloves. Fred looked at the pair given him, and he saw that they were all right.

But Terry now simply pulled off his coat, though he did not remove his shirt. Seeing this, Maguire called out:

"Oh, say, pull off your shirt, or you'll lose it for fair. I'll rip it off on the first jump."

"Oh, I guess not," said Terry, carelessly. "It's catch-as-catch-can, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I don't intend to let you get a hold, so that will be all right."

Maguire was astonished at Terry's confidence and coolness, but he grinned and said:

"Oh, we'll see about that. Are you ready?"

With that he made a bull-like dive at Terry, but Terry put out both hands and pushed him back. Again and again he rushed, but each time Terry evaded him.

"Say, why don't you wrestle?" he called out, angrily.

"Oh, I thought you were going to do the wrestling," said Terry, coolly.

"Well, I can't get a hold."

"I told you that you couldn't when we began."

This made Maguire furious, and he dove for Terry's waist. To his surprise, Terry stood right still and let him come close, and just as their bodies came together Terry wheeled, like a flash of lightning, bringing him around and off his feet in a twinkling, and laying him on his back.

It was done so quickly that Maguire hardly realized it till he looked up into Terry's face, who smiled and said:

"First fall, I guess."

Maguire got up, completely dumfounded, and he stared at Terry.

"I don't see how you did it," he said.

"Oh, I suppose not," laughed Terry. "But I did it well, as you will admit."

"Yes, you certainly did. I'll get the next fall, though."

"All right. Come and get it."

Then Maguire stood back and told Terry he didn't dare to rush.

"Well," said Terry, "it is always my policy to let the other man do the rushing; but, to show you that I can do it if necessary, here goes!"

With that Terry made a sudden dive. Maguire tried to block him off, but Terry went through his guard, and, in a twinkling, had him by the hips and flung him clear over his shoulder and onto his back.

That was enough for the crook, for he got up and began to put on his coat and shirt, saying:

"Mister, I've had enough, and you are the best man."

"Well," laughed Terry, "I am glad you are satisfied. I'm not much at wrestling myself, but I can see that you know nothing about it at all."

But Sandow now pulled off his coat, showing his enormous ridges of muscles, and he grinned, saying:

"Peeler, I'll have to hold up our reputation, I guess, and when I get through with this young kid he'll think he's been to the races."

"All right," laughed Fred. "If you whip me, I'll be man enough to own up to it."

"Say, you're plucky, little geezer, I must say," grinned the giant. "Now, look out for your head!"

He danced up to Fred in a very simple way, flourishing his powerful arms and looking for an opening. Fred saw at once that his guard was never in the right place,

and when Sandow led he simply ducked and sent in a rib-roaster.

Sandow grunted, for the blow had steam, and he swung again. The giant's glove brushed the top of Fred's head, but Fred drove his left glove into the other's solar-plexus.

It was a terrific blow, and the strong man reeled like a giant oak in the wind, and dropped his guard, so that the next moment, quick as lightning, Fred planted a couple of smashes on his jaw.

Sandow staggered around like a drunken man, and Maguire's eyes nearly bulged out of his head.

"Thunder! He's lickin' ye, Sandow! You're all in!"

"No, I'm not!" roared the big fellow, and he rushed at Fred like an elephant. But his blows went wild, and when he tried to hit Fred he was not there, and once he went down on his face from the force of his own rush.

Terry was enjoying it immensely, for he saw that Fred could simply play with his antagonist. Pretty soon Sandow stopped and began to pull off his gloves, saying:

"I've had enough. I'm done, and that's all there is to it. You two chaps are winners, and I'd like to see the athletes who can beat you."

"Oh, it's all over, is it?" laughed Fred. "No hard feelings, my friend?"

"My, my! Not at all," said the strong man, readily. "I've had fair play, and you're simply a better man, and that's all there is to it."

"Say, you fellows are wonders," put in Maguire. "You've got to come into the brotherhood, for we need you."

"All right," said Fearnot. "We will talk that over later, and if you vote us in, we will accept."

"Good! Good! We will call a meeting to-morrow night and you shall become members if no bad mark is found against you," declared Maguire.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CLAIRVOYANT'S POWER.

With that, Maguire got up and opened the door, bidding Fred and Terry to come around the next night.

They promised to do so, and then they glided out of the narrow passage, and in a few moments were in the street.

"Fred," gasped Terry, "we stumbled right into it, didn't we? That was a piece of luck for us."

"So it was, Terry. The mystery of the Shadow Hand is explained all right. Those two crooks are the ringleaders of a very dangerous gang."

"So they are, and we are fortunate in having located them. I suppose we ought to go right over to the police station and notify the police and have the place surrounded and capture the rascals."

"Terry, it is not advisable to do that just yet."

"Great Scott! Why not?"

"Well, I guess you are willing to admit that we really have not enough evidence to hold Maguire and Smith. We must wait and go slow until we can capture their mechanical appliance for making the illusion of the Shadow Hand."

Terry, of course, saw that this was true, and he remarked:

"Well, that ought to be easy, as long as we have got in with them, and they are going to accept us as members of their gang."

"Terry, that will be the most dangerous game we ever tried."

"How is that?"

"Well, if some members of the gang should recognize us they would kill us instantly."

"Good Lord! Of course, they would, for we would be betrayed as their foes. What are we to do?"

"Go home and think it over. I wonder what became of John Rodman?"

"Oh, we lost him in the scuffle in the cafe."

"Well, I would like to see John, for no doubt he could help us."

Fred and Terry had spent a good deal of time in the crooks' den, and it was now a very late hour. They could not accomplish any more that night, so they went home.

They went to bed at once, for they were very tired, but they were up at an early hour the next day. They went down to breakfast, but had scarcely finished when a servant came in, saying that a man was at the door and wanted to see Fred.

"Who is he?" asked Fred.

"I don't know," said the servant, "but he said it was very important."

"Oh, very well," said Fred. "Show him into the reception room."

When Fred went in, a moment later, he saw it was Rodman. The reformed vagabond ran up to Fred eagerly, saying:

"I lost you last night. Where did you go?"

"Rodman," said Fred, "we had some very exciting experiences in the den of the crooks."

"My, my! What do you mean?"

Fred then told Rodman all about his and Terry's experiences with Maguire and Smith. Rodman was greatly astonished, and he said:

"Oh, well, that wouldn't have been possible if I had been with you. So they want you to join the Brotherhood of the Shadow Hand?"

"Yes, yes; they were very eager."

"Do you think of doing so?"

"Well, of course, it would give us an opportunity to easily betray them, and would result in the easy capture of the whole gang."

"Oh, yes: but there would be a terrible risk, for I am sure some of the members of that gang will recognize you and Olcott, and then they would wipe you out."

"Rodman, I have considered that, and I can see that it would be out of the question to take such a risk."

"Yes, I think it would. I believe it would be better to shadow the scoundrels and catch them red-handed."

Fred and Terry agreed that Rodman was right, and they began to lay plans accordingly. While they were thus engaged a messenger came to the door with a note, and when Fred read it he whistled.

"What do you think of that?" he exclaimed, and he passed the note to Terry and Rodman. They read it with a great deal of surprise.

"Dear Mr. Fearnot: I want to see you very much, for your visit of yesterday has given me an inspiration. Please call at my studio this morning, if possible, and I will give you some valuable information."

The note was signed by Madam Frochard, and Terry and Rodman looked at Fred, and Terry asked:

"Fred, what do you make of it?"

"Search me!" said Fred. "The woman has some card which she means to play."

"Well, what can it be?"

Fred shook his head, and then Rodman asked him if he would answer the summons to visit her.

"Oh, yes," said Fred. "I will go down there now, and if you will wait here I will report on my return."

"Of course, we will do that," said Terry. "Things are getting warm, I must say, in this most mysterious of cases."

Fred left the house and he went at once to Madam Frochard's studio, in Twenty-third street. He entered, and the same weazen-faced maid showed him into the richly furnished room.

Then the door opened, and the bewitching clairvoyant came in. She walked up to Fred, in a catlike way, and smiled:

"Mr. Fearnot, it was kind of you to come and see me. Sit here by my side, and I will tell you why I have called you here."

"Madam, I cannot linger," said Fred. "So you will pardon me if I remain standing."

The woman's face flushed, but she remained standing also, and she made reply.

"You do not trust me?"

"Indeed," said Fred, "I would as soon trust a rattlesnake!"

"You are insulting!" she said, angrily. "I called you here to do you a very great favor."

"Great Scott! What favor could you possibly do me? Are you not a member of a gang of thieves?"

"No, I am not!" snapped the beautiful siren, and her eyes flashed like fire, and she stepped nearer, saying:

"Fearnot, I admire you, for you are my master. I have called you here to tell you that I am your slave, and I am ready to betray the Brotherhood of the Shadow Hand if you will only give me your friendship."

"Do you mean that, madam?"

"Yes, with all my heart!"

"Madam, I cannot accept your offer, for I could not trust you. As a matter of fact, the Shadow Hand mystery is a mystery no longer. The members of the band are known, and they will soon be in custody. I advise you to have no more to do with them or you will share their fate."

The woman clenched her hands, and she looked at Fred intently. He saw that she was again trying to hypnotize him, and he laughed and said:

"You cannot fool me! You had better drop that game. Is this all you wish to see me about?"

"No, no, no!" burst forth the woman, and she held out her arms. "I like you! I would live a different life if you would only be kind to me. I am sick of this sort of a life. I am gifted and beautiful, and you would not be ashamed of me. I hate that sweetheart of whom you told me, and I will kill her!"

"Madam, you forget yourself," said Fred, coldly.

"Pardon me," she said, her manner relaxing. "I have forgotten myself, and I am sorry. You see, it is my unfortunate high temper, and when I like any one I cannot bear to have them scorn me."

"I do not scorn you," said Fred. "I only pity you."

"Don't, don't say that! Please be merciful to me, for you are noble and good and true! My life has been a hard one in the past; but with you it will be of the highest and noblest."

Fred saw that the strange woman was the victim of a very great passion, and he felt sorry for her, but he felt toward her as he would toward a beautiful snake, so he turned to go, but she sprung before him.

"No, no!" he gasped. "You can't go! You must stay here!"

She was in a state of the very wildest excitement, and for a moment Fred was in a quandary, and he was sorry he had come to the place.

"Madam," he said, firmly, "this is foolish, for I cannot be anything to you, nor you to me. Please stand aside, and let me go."

Just then the woman threw up her arms and gave a scream. Fred half turned his head, but as he did so the floor sank beneath his feet, and he went down into darkness.

He did not have time to clutch at anything, but he felt that he was in a lower room, the trap having closed above him. It was utter darkness, and Fred muttered, as he crawled to his feet:

"Well, well! This is a pretty scrape! I have been a fool!"

This was just the way he felt, and he was very angry at himself. But he was in the scrape, and he could only try now to get out of it.

Fred had some matches in his pocket, and he lighted one. The blaze showed the walls of a windowless room, which was apparently in the centre of the building.

There was a ventilator near the ceiling, and there was a very strong door with a steel wicket window in it.

"Well, well!" muttered Fred. "This is a fine hole to drop into! I wonder what she meant to do with me?"

Just then there was a silvery laugh, and the wicket window opened, and he saw the face of the scheming woman. She was very triumphant, and she said:

"Mr. Fearnot, I have you in my power, as you may realize. I am not accustomed to give up anything I set my heart on. I am going to bring you to your knees before I am through with you. You have scorned me, and I am going to humble you."

"Indeed!" said Fred, very coolly. "It is a very strange affection which you have, that will permit you to inflict suffering upon the one you care for."

"Oh, that shows the intensity of my affection for you."

"Great Scott! Do you expect to win my regard in such a way?"

"Yes, for you will learn to fear me—and fear is love!"

Fred went closer to the wicket, and he asked the woman if she really meant to keep him imprisoned there.

"I shall never let you out," she said, "till you have promised that you will treat me with affection. We can be very happy, for we will go abroad, and the world holds many pleasures. Unless you promise I will kill your sweetheart, for I now know her, and we cannot live in the same world."

Fred experienced a cold chill, for he thought of Evelyn and he knew the woman was really bad enough to carry out her threat from jealous hatred.

"Good Lord!" he reflected. "What am I to do?"

Then he said aloud:

"Madam, your game will not work. You cannot keep me confined here, for my friends know that I came here and they will come here and tear down this building to find me."

"Oh, but they will not find me here," she said. "My sign is being taken down, and my room is being stripped. When they enter the place will be empty. This room has an entrance from an outer court, and it is my secret and that of the owner of the house. They will think we have fled together."

She laughed mockingly, and Fred began to realize worse than ever what an awful scrape he was in.

"You are a fiend!" he gritted. "Let me out of here! You can never bring me to your terms!"

"Then I will have the satisfaction of knowing that you will never be another's," she said, mockingly. "If I do not win you, no one else will!"

Fred was at his wits' ends, but the woman now went away, and he was left in darkness, and to his own bitter reflections.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he muttered. "What a fool I was!"

That was really all he could say, and he sat down on the floor of his cell and tried to think. Pretty soon he got up and went to the door and tried to force it.

It would not yield, and then he went carefully along the walls, trying them, but he found they were solid.

Hours passed, and Fred remained in utter darkness. It was a terrible situation, and he was very angry at himself and at the woman who was the cause of his trouble.

After a while he began to feel an intolerable thirst. He became conscious of a pungent vapor, which seemed to fill the room. It tickled his throat and made him cough, and induced a terrible thirst.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "She is a fiend, for this is a device to make me long for water, and to hasten my end."

The thirst became intolerable. Fred had his watch, and by lighting a match he kept track of the hours as they sped by, and he reckoned that he had been in the place over twenty hours, when the wicket window opened again, and the woman's mocking voice said:

"Sweetheart, I have come to bring you news. Your friends are searching for you everywhere, and they believe you have been murdered. They do not suspect the truth that you are here. The Shadow Hand is flourishing, and the gang know that you and your friend are trying to bring them to prison. Your friend is marked and is to die. That is all."

The woman stopped to laugh in her mocking way, and she went on:

"This is not all, for I have reserved one thing to the last. A message has been sent to your sweetheart to come to New York to meet you. When she reaches here she will walk right into a trap, and that will be the end of her. You will never see her alive again!"

Fred gasped and a great cry of horror escaped him.

"Oh, you she demon!" he shouted. "You will not dare do such a thing! That is awful! Oh, I will have revenge if you do it!"

"See here, my noble fellow," said the woman in a chuckling voice. "It will be upon your head, for it is in your power to save her. You refuse, and she dies!"

Fred nearly went insane with horror, for when he thought of Evelyn's awful peril he was beside himself. He then began to plead with the woman, but she only jeered at him.

Finally she shut the wicket, saying:

"When I come again I will tell you of her death. I hate her!"

She was gone, and Fred was left in an awful condition of fear and horror. He was bathed in cold perspiration, and he walked up and down, wringing his hands, and saying:

"Oh, Evelyn! Evelyn! I must save you! I must save you!"

Fred had not the least doubt but that the scheming woman would carry out her threat, and do harm to Evelyn. She had just the vicious, revengeful nature for that.

For once in his life, Fearnot was at his wits' end. He could think of no way to escape, and yet he knew that he must to save the life of his sweetheart.

CHAPTER IX.

RESCUING EVELYN.

Fred Fearnot walked up and down the cell and tried to compose himself and think clearly.

Finally he thought to temporize with his captor, so he went to the wicket window and beat upon it and called to her.

But there was no answer, and he could only hear the echo of his own voice. Finally he tried the door once more, but it was securely bolted.

Fred knew that the door was of wood, and he lighted a match and examined it closely. This resulted in a discovery which gave him hope.

The hinges were on the inside. They were heavy, and were of the butt variety, set in the frame with screws. Fred had quite a number of tapers or matches in his pocket and he lighted one of these and examined the hinges. There were two of them—one a few inches from the top and the other a few inches from the bottom.

"By George!" muttered Fred. "If I had a chisel I could easily split that frame and dig those hinges out."

He had no chisel, but he had a strong knife, and he drew it out and began work. The wood was tough, but he worked hard, cutting away a little at a time, and pretty soon he had an aperture under one of the hinges.

Fred then reached in and forced one of the screws out of the wood.

With a match he managed to char the wood, so that the hinge was entirely disconnected from the door frame.

It was now necessary, of course, to treat the other hinge the same, and he worked at it like a beaver.

"Time is everything," muttered Fearnot. "Human life is at stake!"

Fred worked harder and harder, and he dug into the tough wood. His fingers were sore and bleeding, but he didn't care for that, and finally the second hinge was released.

Fred gasped with joy, and then he inserted his fingers and gradually but firmly pulled back on the door until it swung inward on the lock alone, and then fell, with a crash.

Fred sprung out into the passage.

All was darkness, of course, but he lit a match and followed the corridor.

To his horror, he encountered another door, which was locked as securely as the first.

"Good Lord!" muttered Fred. "It is getting worse all the time. I am lost, for I can never release this door from its hinges, as they are on the other side."

However, he examined the door carefully, and then he hurled his weight against it.

It shook and rattled. Once again he threw his weight upon it, and then it slowly swung back, and, to his amazement, he saw that he had smashed the bolt in the lock.

Steps were before him, and he saw a landing above, and up this he ran full haste.

When Fred reached the landing above he entered a corridor leading sharply to the right, and the next moment he was in a room, which was partly filled with lumber and furniture.

The light of day from the windows blinded him for a moment, and he was obliged to wait before he could recover his vision. Pretty soon he was able to look about, and then he saw a door, which evidently led to the street.

It was locked, but the upper part of the door was of glass. Fred smashed the glass and reached the lock on the other side, but of course there was no key in it. However, the upper part of the door being of glass, left a large aperture, through which he crawled with ease.

He ran along the corridor to an open door, leading out onto the street, and as he emerged into the open air he saw pedestrians hurrying along the sidewalks, and all the bustle and bustle of the big city, and he muttered:

"By George! It is like coming back to life!"

Across the street was a telegraph office, and he rushed over there and sent a despatch to Fredonia to warn Evelyn not to leave home, if she had not left already.

Then Fred called a cab and was driven as fast as he could be taken to the Fearnot residence in Fifth avenue. As he sprung up the steps, the door opened, and Terry and a detective stepped out.

The moment Terry saw Fred, he let out a yell that could be heard a block away, and he threw his arms around his chum.

"Oh, Fred! Fred! We had given you up for dead, for we thought the Shadow Hand gang had laid for you."

"Terry, I've been locked up in darkness for forty hours. Where is Evelyn?"

"Evelyn!" ejaculated Terry. "Why at home, in Fredonia!"

"Are you sure of that, Terry?"

"Why, where else would she be?"

"Terry, that is the awful thing about it, for that woman has set a trap for her, and means to kill her!"

Terry was dumfounded. But Fred now quickly related his experiences, which were understood at once, and the detective said:

"Mr. Fearnot has good reason for worrying. I advise sending a despatch to Fredonia at once to find out if Miss Olcott has left there."

"I have done so," said Fred. "But in the meantime we must assume that she has come down to New York, and we must put every detective in the city on her track."

Fred was very faint and nervous, and Terry insisted that he should come in and have necessary food and drink, saying:

"Fred, you will break down, and then you will be able to do nothing, so come in."

The detective hurried away to carry the news to Headquarters that Fearnot had been found and to have an alarm sent out for Miss Olcott, also special men to round up and arrest the clairvoyant, Madam Frochard.

"Terry," said Fred, "that was the most awful experience I ever had in my life!"

"Well, it must have been."

"I suffered awful mental agony, for that woman really meant to carry out her threat."

"Fred, she is a tigress!"

"So she is, and I hope to see her behind bars, where she belongs. My, my! It was an awful experience! I only hope and pray Evelyn has not left Fredonia."

Just then the doorbell rang, and a messenger came in with a telegram. Fred broke the cover and read, hastily:

"Evelyn left for New York yesterday. What is wrong?
"Eunice Olcott."

It was Evelyn's mother who had sent the message. Fred now jumped up, saying:

"Terry, if that woman does harm to Evelyn, I will see her hanged!"

"Well, I reckon, Fred! What shall we do?"

"Go over to the depot and see if we can find a clew."

"Oh, she must have got in last night, and we will not be likely to find any clew."

"Well, Terry, we can only try."

"Wait a minute, Fred. I want to tell you about Maguire and Sandow Smith, and our experience trying to round them up in their den."

"Oh, you can tell me that as we go along," said Fred, as he hurried away for the Grand Central Depot.

And Terry did so. He had quite a story to tell, for, after Fred's disappearance, he and Rodman had gone to the clairvoyant's den and, finding it closed, they had called out a posse of officers and raided the East Side den.

Both Maguire and Smith were captured and taken to

the Tombs. They could only be held on suspicion, for each swore he had nothing to do with the Shadow Hand, and there was no proof against them.

"They are in the Tombs at present," said Terry. "But they will very likely not be kept there long."

"Oh, I see," said Fred. "Well, they are the ringleaders, and we could break up the gang if we could only keep them there."

"Yes, but we have not yet discovered the mechanism for creating the illusion of the Shadow Hand."

"We will get it later. Hello! Who is that over there?"

Both Fred and Terry saw a man on the opposite sidewalk beckoning to them, eagerly.

He wore a very full beard, and Fred and Terry did not recognize him. But as they crossed over he suddenly pulled off the beard, and Fred gasped:

"Why, it's John Rodman!"

It was the reformed crook, and at sight of Fred he was overjoyed. He fairly embraced him, saying:

"Oh, my! Oh, my! We had given you up for dead, for we thought the gang had killed you!"

Fred briefly described his experiences, and then Rodman said:

"Have good courage, for I don't believe the she-fiend has been able to fasten her claws upon Miss Olcott yet. There is no doubt she is in the trap, but Madam Frochard is in Jersey City, where she was called by an exigency, and Miss Olcott must have arrived since she went away."

"Good Lord! That is all we want to know, Rodman! Where in Jersey City is the clairvoyant?"

"Well, it was a house in Seaman avenue, but she may have left there by this time. I do not know where Miss Olcott is detained."

"By George!" exclaimed Terry. "If this scheming fortune teller is still in Jersey City I can tell you how to decoy her."

"Terry, how is that?"

"Well," said Terry, "it is the simplest thing in the world. Simply send her a wire purporting to be from Peeler Maguire to meet him at the Post Office, downtown. We can be there to give her greeting."

Fred went over and sent the telegram to the address in Jersey City, and then all three boarded a downtown car for the Post Office.

They waited in the corridor and kept watch through a window of the crowds coming up from the ferries. Pretty soon Rodman declared that he saw her coming around the corner of the Astor House.

Fred looked closely, and he at once recognized the graceful figure and beautiful features of the wickedest woman in New York. Madam Frochard crossed the street and she came quickly into the Post Office and looked around.

Terry had taken the precaution to 'phone to Headquarters for a detective, and he was on hand. As the woman gave a glance around Fred stepped forward.

At sight of Fred she started, as if shot, and her face went deadly pale, and she gasped:

"You! You! Where did you come from?"

"Well, I guess you know that as well as any one," said Fred, coldly. "You see I got out, in spite of all your clever precautions, and I am here at your service."

The woman looked like a beautiful reptile at bay, and she began to recede toward the door.

But Fred made a signal to the detective, and he stepped forward to make the arrest. Instantly she pulled a tiny revolver from her bosom and fired at Fred.

The bullet just missed his ear, and the next moment the detective had wrenched the weapon from her, and he called out:

"Get a cab, gentlemen! I will take her to Headquarters."

Terry ran out and called a cab. Of course, the shot and the arrest had called a crowd to the spot, and there was a lot of excitement.

But the officer placed his fair prisoner in a cab and drove away to the Tombs. Fred drew a deep breath.

Rodman then expressed his belief that Evelyn had been taken to a certain house in Lexington avenue by her abductors.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you might not believe it, but there are men in this Shadow Hand gang who ought to be in better business than levying blackmail upon credulous, wealthy persons. In Lexington avenue is a physician known as Dr. Gardell. He is one of the gang, and it is my belief that Miss Olcott has been taken to his house."

With that they went over to Headquarters and were given a search warrant, and, with a couple of officers to serve it, they proceeded to the residence in Lexington avenue.

Over the door was the doctor's sign. The two officers with Fred and Terry were in citizens' dress, so they excited no suspicion, and were shown at once into the doctor's office. Presently he came in, a foxy-faced man, wearing a Vandyke beard.

"Ah, gentlemen!" he said. "What is the trouble now? You all look like very healthy patients."

"Doctor, we are," said Fred. "We have not come here for treatment ourselves, but to inquire for a very beautiful, young woman, whom we have good reason to believe is in your house."

"I have patients in my house," said the doctor, coolly; "but none of them can be seen."

"Well, we came with proper authority," said Fred, and he made a motion to the detective, who produced the search warrant. "Does this satisfy you?"

The physician turned pale, and it was seen that he was greatly excited.

"No patient of that name is here," he declared.

"Gentlemen," said Fred, "do your duty. Make the search!"

"One moment," interposed the doctor, "remember, I am in nowise responsible for patients brought here. I take them for treatment on the responsibility of their friends."

"Let me see," said Fred, "you treat mental cases mostly?"

"Yes; but not the violent insane. You are at liberty to search my house, but I am not personally responsible for any patient found here."

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

The two detectives now proceeded to make a thorough search of the house. In several rooms they found patients afflicted with light mental disorders.

But finally it seemed as if their quest was to be unrewarded, when Terry called attention to a door that seemed to open into another part of the house.

"Gentlemen," said the doctor, "that enters the next house, and I don't believe you will find it necessary to go in there."

"We are here to look the place over thoroughly," said one of the detectives. "Open the door."

"But I have no key. It is not a part of my house."

One of the detectives placed his shoulder against the door and burst it in.

A narrow corridor was seen. At the end of it was another door, and then Fred heard a movement and a slight scream beyond.

"Evelyn! Evelyn!" he called out. "Is it you, dear?"

Instantly there was a joyful scream, and Evelyn's voice was heard:

"Oh, Fred! Fred! I am so glad you have come!"

The doctor pretended to be amazed, saying that he did not know any one was in there, and, in fact, that he knew nothing about the existence of the room. But one of the detectives slipped handcuffs on him.

"What are you arresting me for? I haven't done anything."

"Oh, we'll arrest you for precaution," laughed the detective. "Don't feel bad, for you will get a show."

Fred had ran up to the door and, with his great strength, he burst it in. The next moment Evelyn was in his arms. The poor girl wept with joy.

"Oh, Fred," she said. "I didn't know what it all meant. I got a telegram from you saying you were ill, and for me to come at once."

"Dear, it was the work of a scheming and unprincipled woman."

"My, my! I was dreadfully worried! I took the first train for New York, and a man met me, who claimed you had sent him. When I got into the carriage I was brought here and locked up."

"Dear, it has all come out right. The villains are in prison, and they will get what they deserve."

Of course, explanations followed, and then the detectives went away with their prisoner, and Fred and Terry and Evelyn got into a cab to be driven to the Fearnot residence.

"Fred," said Evelyn, "I came away from Fredonia very quickly, and mother needs me, so I think I had better go home to-morrow."

"Dear, I can't let you go so soon. If you can wait a day or two Terry and I will go with you, for I declare this affair has so shaken my nerves that I feel the need of a rest."

Evelyn was delighted.

"Oh, will you?" she asked, eagerly. "That will be wonderful, and they will all be glad to see you."

The next morning the newspapers were full of the capture of the clever woman swindler, Madam Frochard. Plenty of evidence was found among her effects that she was a member of the Shadow Hand gang.

Then she broke down and made a full confession, implicating fully a dozen quite prominent men, as well as half a dozen clever crooks, Maguire and Smith among them.

Madam Frochard also explained, quite logically, the illusion of the Shadow Hand, which was produced by means of refracting rays, through a series of powerful lenses, with a chemical to furnish the light. The apparatus was so small and simple that it could be carried in the hand and in every case where it was used the operator was either hidden in the room, by means of a confederate, or was at a window.

That afternoon Fred received a strange note, which read:

"My dear Mr. Fearnot: Life is a closed book for me now, but I would have gone on to the end of the chapter happily if I had not met you. Whether you believe it or not, I will state that you took me by storm, and I have done nothing but think of you, and the last picture in my mind when death comes will be your handsome face and noble figure.

"I hope you will not sneer at a poor girl's love, and I ask only to once more gaze upon your face and to speak with you, before the end comes. Please grant this request, for I will never ask another of you. Please come to me in the Tombs.

"Madam Sylvia Frochard."

Fred showed the letter to Evelyn, who said:

"Poor creature! I can see that she feels deeply, and, although she may be a very bad woman, Fred, I would grant her request and go and see her."

"Dear, I will go if you will go with me."

"All right," assented Evelyn, "I will go with you."

When they reached the prison Fred and Terry were shown to the cell of Madam Frochard. She came to the bars and gazed at Fred long and earnestly, and then at Evelyn. There was not a trace of hatred or jealousy about her, and Fred said:

"Madam Frochard, I have granted your request and I have come to see you, and I have brought my sweetheart."

"Yes, yes," said the fair prisoner. "I can see that she is very beautiful, and you are a lucky man. She is more beautiful than I am."

"Madam," said Evelyn, "I am sorry that you should have had such bitter feeling toward me."

"My dear," said Madam Frochard, "I am a very strong-willed woman. I have no hatred for you now, for it is all over, and you have the prize which could never be mine."

Then the beautiful siren told Fred and Evelyn much about her life.

"It is a very sad story," she said. "I am a native of France, and as a child in Langedoc, I used to look at the wide horizon and long to see what was in the world beyond. One day I ran away from home. I found friends, who brought me to Paris. I grew up in that gay city, and then I came to America.

"I may have led a gay life, but I never met any one before like your lover. He is no noble and brave and hand-

some! Oh, you are lucky, Mademoiselle! I wish you luck, but poor Sylvia has only death left!"

Suddenly Fred saw her hand emerge from a fold of her dress, and he saw the gleam of a dagger.

Quick as lightning, Fred's hand shot through the bars, and he grabbed her wrist. The dagger fell to the pavement outside.

The keepers came running up excitedly, and then the beautiful siren began to weep and sob.

"Madam," said Fred, in a kindly tone, "what a rash thing you would have done! It was wrong!"

"Yes, yes," sobbed the beautiful prisoner. "But what is there in life for me? I must go to prison. When I come out I must be disgraced for life. People will pass me by with a shrug. Ladies will draw their skirts—not for Sylvia the cream of life again. I want to die!"

Then Evelyn went up to the bars and talked to her in a kindly and soothing way.

Gradually her sobs ceased and finally she pressed her pretty face to the bars and looked long at Evelyn.

"Bless your kind heart!" she said. "You are an angel and I shall never forget you!"

Fred and Evelyn then took their leave a little later, and on their way home they discussed the unfortunate woman, and Evelyn said:

"Fred, it is one of the saddest cases I ever knew, for she is a very beautiful woman, and might have had a wonderful career."

Of course, now that the mystery of the Shadow Hand had been solved, Fred and Terry felt at liberty to leave New York.

They went over to the theater and called on the famous actress, and she thanked them many times, saying:

"I believe if I had been haunted much longer by that terrible apparition I should have gone insane."

A day or two later Fred's parents arrived, and they were exceedingly glad to see him, and Mrs. Fearnot kissed her brilliant son, and said:

"Oh, Fred, Fred! It does seem good to see my dear boy once more! I have thought of you so many times, and now I hope you will stay at home for a long time."

"Mother, dear," laughed Fred, "that is expecting a good deal of Terry and me, for you know we have so many interests to attend to in various parts of the country that it is hard to remain in one place."

"Mother," laughed Judge Fearnot, "don't you know the boys well enough to know that they will not stay at home. I'll bet they have plans laid now for an excursion to Mexico or Salvador, or some other part of the world."

"Oh, no, pop; it is only as far as Fredonia this time."

"My, my! You only came from there a short time ago."

"Yes, that is so, but Terry has got to see his sweetheart, and then we have some plans to make up there. Oh, we haven't left New York yet, and we're going to have some fun before we do, for mother and I are going to the theatre, anyway."

This delighted Mrs. Fearnot, for she loved to sit in the theatre beside her distinguished son, and watch the play. Fred sent out and got some tickets.

For the next few days Fred and Terry and Evelyn whooped things up in New York, and they had a glorious time. They went driving and to the theatre and called on many of their old friends.

Really, the boys were sorry when it all came to an end, which it did when Evelyn received a telegram from Mrs. Olcott asking her to come home.

It was decided to go to Fredonia the next day, after Evelyn received the telegram. Fred and Terry went downtown and fixed up all their business affairs, for they expected to remain in Fredonia for a week or ten days at least.

"Fred," said Terry, "if we hang around that little place we'll have to scare up some fun. I wonder if we couldn't scare up a football eleven in Fredonia, and play Dick Harris's eleven or some other? These nipping, cool days make me feel just like getting into the game."

Fred wired the Fredonia folks that they were coming. That very morning, though, he was walking down the street when a man came up and touched him on the arm.

"Rodman!" exclaimed Fred. "Say, you are looking splendid, and it seems to me that you are prospering."

"Mr. Fearnot," said the ex-tramp, "I am in business for myself, for I have bought a small store in Seventh avenue, and I am doing a splendid business."

"Rodman, I am glad to know that, and I wish you success."

"I wish you would come over and see my place."

"Thank you. We are about leaving town. However, I will call the next time I come down."

"Fearnot, I hope you will never forget the night in Sperotti's, when the police cleaned the place out?"

"My, no!" laughed Fred. "I surely will never forget that evening with Sandow Smith and his pal, Maguire. We had lots of sport. I suppose they are on the road to Sing Sing now?"

"Fearnot, their trial comes off next week. I think I shall go to see it, for I am pretty much interested."

Rodman shook hands and walked away, and Terry coming up at that moment, Fred said:

"Terry, I tell you it is possible to reform a crook, and there is a living example of it. That fellow is absolutely reformed."

"Yes, yes, he seems to be, Fred," agreed Terry; "but I've seen some that you couldn't reform, and I guess you have, too."

"Of course. But I think more of having put that poor fellow on the right track than anything I've done for a good many days, I tell you. Well, that's the way the world goes. And now we're off for Fredonia."

THE END.

Read "FRED FEARNOT'S SIXTY-YARD RUN; or, CHAMPION OF THE FOOTBALL FIELD," which will be the next number (166) of "Work and Win."

SPECIAL NOTICE: All back numbers of this weekly are always in print. If you cannot obtain them from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

WORK AND WIN

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 1, 1907.

Terms to Subscribers.

Single Copies	.05 Cents
One Copy Three Months	.65 "
One Copy Six Months	$1.25
One Copy One Year	2.50

Postage Free.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

The inventor of the watch is a mystery, though the place of its invention is assigned to Nuremberg. The first watches were called "Nuremberg eggs," the first part of the name showing where they were made, the second telling of their shape. It was not until the invention of the spiral spring, in the fifteenth century, that watches became conveniently portable, and from that time the size decreased, while the timekeeping mechanism improved.

A number of society women have recently taken up step-dancing, and several have become very accomplished exponents of the art. At present the craze is for the Spanish dance, which, although less lively than other national dances, combines steps and poses that express every possible shade of sentiment. But the British girl does not know, as the Spanish girl does, the secret of dancing with every feature and muscle of her body. The latter can express every emotion of joy, anger, disappointment, or defiance by gesture alone as her feet keep graceful time to the music. In fact, her motions speak more plainly than words, and, unlike them, can in no way be misconstrued.

A visitor from another city here on a tour of inspection of the public schools came to a West Philadelphia school the other day when the pupils were writing original sentences on the blackboard, and found an opportunity to air his pet hobby of avoiding superfluity in the use of words. One boy had written: "The man suddenly fell down." "What is the need of the word 'down' in that sentence?" asked the visitor. "How else could the man fall?" "Over," promptly replied the boy who had written the sentence. "Backwards," suggested another. "Against a wall," volunteered a third. "Upstairs," said still another. The visitor promptly gave up criticism, and was silent during the remainder of his stay.

On the island of Elba there lately died a man named Melani, who, though a millionaire, had for many years lived as a guest in a peasant's family. He had, it seems, completely lost his memory, and had certainly forgotten that he was so rich. He always lived as a poor man, passing his time in meditation and prayer, so that the fishers of the island reckoned him as a saint. M. Melani bequeathed everything he had to his kind-hearted hosts, who, as can easily be understood, were surprised beyond measure when they heard how rich their former guest had been. At Pistoja, in Tuscany, M. Melani owned a magnificent mansion, which had been kept closed since 1556. On opening the house, after the owner's death, it was found that all the furniture and artistic objects had disappeared—nobody knows how or when. An only relative is opposing the will, on the ground that deceased was of unsound mind.

The chipmunk is not usually considered much of a song-bird, but, according to Ernest Thompson Seton, he is quite a success in a vocal role. In Manitoba the chipmunk comes above ground about the first or second week of April, says Mr. Seton, in Success. Mounted on some log or root, it reiterates a loud chirpy "Chuck-chuck-chuck!" Other chipmunks run forth into the sunlight, and, seeking some perch, add their "Chuck-chuck-chuck" to the spring salute. They are active from this time of the year on, and their sunny-morning chorus is not by any means confined to that original outburst. On April 29, 1905, at Cos Cob, I heard a chipmunk in full song. He kept it up for eleven minutes without ceasing, and uttered one hundred and thirty chirps to the minute. He got no reply, though he worked very hard and seemed tired toward the last. On May 28, 1905, at Cos Cob, I heard a chipmunk singing. He kept it up for three minutes, uttering three chirps to the second.

A FEW SMILES.

Self-Made Man (to highly educated grandson)—Well, Teddy, my boy, and what do you learn at school? Teddy—Latin and Greek, and French and algebra. Self-Made Man—Ho, indeed! And what's the algebra for cabbage?

Three doctors in Kalamazoo were holding a consultation. They looked the patient over thoroughly and well, expending fully ten minutes' time diagnosing the case with care. Then they retired to an adjoining room, closed the door, and a somewhat heated argument followed. One of the doctors thought the man had money; two were sure he hadn't. They did not operate.

That a little firecracker can make a great stir can be proved by a fat, good-natured resident of Westminster Avenue. He was enjoying a fusillade of continuous firecrackers on the porch recently when a well-meaning neighbor dropped a little cracker down his back. The man jumped up with a war-whoop and fire in his eye. There was a hissing sound, accompanied by a puff of smoke, which came out of his collar. But before the cracker got a chance to do its most damaging work a pretty girl visitor, sitting nearby, grabbed a pitcher of lemonade and emptied it down the man's back. The cracker was put out of business and the man looked like a dishcloth. He had to take off his Fourth of July clothes and jump into ordinary every-day togs. The sociable neighbor who dropped the cracker down his back said that he didn't think the cracker was lighted. "I know you didn't," said a youngster on the porch, "but I saw you were trying to drop it down pop's back, and I put a little light on it when you wasn't lookin'."

A resident of Hudson, Wis., was deploring the resignation of Senator Spooner. "The Senate can't afford to lose a mind like that," he said. "I know the man well. He practised law in this town for fifteen years or thereabouts. He won every case he set his hand to. It was no surprise to us Hudsonites to find that John C. Spooner was the finest legal mind in the Senate. We knew him of old, you see. When he had a case on we used to go in droves to hear him plead. I remember to this day a story that he once told in court in a case where he was showing how, with a good motive, one might still do a lot of harm. He said that two aged Scotch ministers sat talking one day over their church warden pipes. 'Last Sawbath,' said the younger of the two old men, 'only three folk cam' to my kirk, and since it was an awfu' cauld, snawy, stormy mornin' I juist took them over to the manse, read a chapter, gied them a prayer, and then, to ward off the rheumatics, a guid stiff glass of the best whiskey.' The other minister smiled. ''Aweel,' he said, 'ye will hae a fine congregation, my brither, the next stormy day.'"

THE LAST APPEAL

OR,

LIFE FOR LIFE

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG.

The court-martial had been held and was finished—the dreadful sentence had been spoken!

A gun boomed from the frigate, and, while the echo of its hollow roar was still rumbling through the innermost depths of the huge ship, the captain, who acted as judge-advocate, rose and said:

"John Marvil, marine private, the court finds you guilty! To-morrow shall you be seated upon your own coffin, and then and there shot dead by a volley from the muskets of your comrades!"

White as death itself stood the prisoner between the marine guard.

A fine, handsome soldier, as straight as a pine, he did not look like one who could have purposely fired the shot on that dark night, a month ago—the shot which had so narrowly missed the first lieutenant, Harry Somers, who, at the time, was officer of the deck.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a deep, solemn voice, with his clear, eagle gaze upon the captain's face, "the court finds me guilty! But, sir, there is a higher court up there, which knows I am innocent!"

And, as he spoke, John Marvil pointed upward.

"By God, sir!" cried Lieut. Somers. "I have said from the first that I believed the shot was accidentally fired, and I feel sure of it now!"

"Sir, sir!" said the captain, reprovingly, "only the importance of the occasion can excuse your warmth!"

"I apologize, sir," said the lieutenant, courteously, "and you would excuse my hasty expression did you know how deeply and truly I believe in this young man's innocence! I suggest —entreat that he have another trial!"

Then all the other officers of the old frigate Ironsides gathered about the captain and joined their entreaties to those of Somers.

Meanwhile, the eyes of the prisoner were turned upward.

His lips moved, but he spoke not. He was silently praying.

The captain looked troubled—irresolute.

"I would suggest, sir, that we examine Marvil's musket again," said Lieut. Somers. "The lock must have been out of order, and caused it to accidentally go off. This witness, Irwin Bart, though he has been a gunsmith, as he says, yet may have overlooked it."

"No, sir!" answered Irwin Bart, a tall, powerful, evil-looking young sailor, who had been selected to carefully inspect the lock of the musket.

Marvil looked keenly at the speaker, who, however, shunned his gaze.

While ashore at Valparaiso a few months previously, the two had fallen in love with a pretty Spanish girl, who had favored Marvil and promised to be his bride after he should be discharged from the frigate at the expiration of his term of service.

This had embittered his rival, Bart, against him.

"I request," continued Lieut. Somers, "that the ship's armorer be sent for to examine the musket. There is not a better judge than he."

"Be it so," answered the captain.

The armorer was sent for.

Up he came, grim and gray-haired, from the depths of the hold.

The musket was passed to him as he stepped before the court. The old fellow keenly scrutinized the lock.

At first he said there was nothing the matter with it. Then he tried it again, and looked at it.

"Ay, ay, gentlemen," came his deep, rumbling voice. "The spring is loose. The hammer of such a piece would be apt to come down of itself at any moment, causing the musket to accidentally go off."

"There, sir!" cried Lieut. Somers to the captain. "Is not that proof of Marvil's innocence?"

"Excuse me, sir," said Irwin Bart, "but, as I have said all along, I was the only man near the prisoner at the time he fired, and I saw him aim his musket at you!"

The lieutenant sternly gazed upon the speaker.

The latter shrank before his piercing eyes.

"I believe this man speaks falsely," said Somers.

"God knows he does!" cried Marvil.

"Enough!" said the captain. "The prisoner shall have another trial."

And so the court-martial was continued.

Lieut. Somers was eloquent in Marvil's defense.

"I believe him to be as innocent of all evil intention," he said, "as my own child."

This had a powerful effect on the court.

It was known that the lieutenant idolized his child, a motherless little girl of ten, whom he had left at home in New York when he sailed.

In fact, the prisoner would have been acquitted but for that "stumbling block" Irwin Bart, who persisted in his assertion that he had seen Marvil aim his musket at Somers.

The latter felt convinced that the fellow lied.

It was the third day after the commencement of Marvil's second trial.

Early in the morning, ere the court sat, Somers, who had been superintending some work near the ward-room, stepped for a moment behind one of the after guns, when he overheard these words muttered in a low voice:

"He shall not escape! I'll have him convicted and shot if I can bring it about! No one can prove that I lie!"

Looking over the gun the officer saw Bart, who was crouched down, busy with some of the lashings, as ordered by the master, who had the early watch.

In an instant the lieutenant caught the man by the back of his collar and jerked him to his feet. Glaring fiercely straight into the fellow's eyes, he said, sternly:

"I overheard you, rascal!"

Bart's face blanched.

He trembled from head to foot.

"For God's sake, sir, don't betray me!" he cried, hoarsely.

"Come, make a full confession, or it'll be the worse for you!" said Somers. "Own that all you have said against Marvil was false!"

"But I will be flogged for it!"

"You deserve to be. However, come with me to the captain, make your confession before him, and I will do what I can in behalf of such a wretch."

The captain just then came from his cabin.

Somers dragged Bart before him, and the trembling wretch then and there acknowledged that he had not seen him fire the musket at the lieutenant, but that, on the contrary, he had noticed that it went off accidentally, as the marine inclined the piece to examine the lock.

"Master-at-arms!" responded that functionary, jumping up from before the little desk, where he had as usual been seated, and promptly advancing with the customary salute.

"Take off Marvil's irons, liberate him from the brig, and send him to his duty. Then come back and put this rascal in his place!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The master-at-arms at once went forward to the brig, and a moment later Marvil, the overjoyed marine, was seen making for his quarters.

But, as his liberator was advancing to put the irons on Bart, the latter, with a savage oath, suddenly bounded off and ran up the after hatchway to the spar-deck.

"Ho, there, marines!" shouted the captain. "Away you go, and arrest that man—alive!"

But, as his liberator was advancing to put the irons on Bart, the latter, with a savage oath, suddenly bounded off and ran up the after hatchway to the spar-deck.

"Ho, there, marines!" shouted the captain. "Away you go, and arrest that man—alive!"

The lieutenant of marines promptly sprang forth.

"Fall in, lads!" he cried. "Lively there!"

There was a rattling of muskets, and in a twinkling the marines, with Marvil now among them, fell in line, like clockwork.

"Shoulder arms—forward—march! Double-quick!" ordered their officer.

"Confound your tactics, sir!" growled the captain. "However, excuse me, sir!" he added, as the marine officer looked hurt, "but don't lose more time than you can help!"

Up the steps to the spar-deck went the marines, followed by Lieut. Somers and the captain.

The frigate, at this time, was a hundred miles or so off the Gallipagos, in the Pacific Ocean.

During the night there had been a violent gale, and the seas were now pitching and rolling the big ship about in a way that made every old timber creak like the voice of a ghost.

It was too rough to lower a boat, as the marines well knew.

Therefore, when they saw the villain, Bart, running up the mizzen-rigging, provided with a formidable, short-handled axe, which he had snatched from the carpenter's chest, and they were ordered to pursue and capture him alive, if possible, most of them dreaded a tumble into the seas.

Bart, keeping to leeward, had swung himself past the few topmen, at this early hour, in the mizzen-top. With the axe stuck under the closely-fitting jacket he wore over his broad-collared shirt, he nimbly crawled out upon the mizzen-gaff, and began to descend the topping-lift leading down to the long, heavy spanker-boom projecting far out over the ship's stern.

As the marines, with muskets strapped across their backs, ascended the rigging, Bart laughed scornfully.

In fact, the climbing of most of the soldiers was very slow and awkward. Marvil, however, was an exception.

He was an active young fellow, and kept ahead of his comrades.

Seeing Bart descending toward the spanker-boom, Lieut. Somers, forgetting in his eagerness that he had not a sword or weapon of any kind about him at this hour, ran out to the end of the boom to head off the fugitive.

"Back to the deck, you rascal!" he shouted, as Bart dropped astraddle of the boom.

"Not until I split your skull, you—luff!" roared Bart.

In an instant, disengaging his axe, he leaned over toward the lieutenant, lifting the weapon with his right hand, while supporting himself on the boom with the left.

"Hold, rascal! My God! Somers will be cut down by the villain!" shouted the captain.

He and the lieutenant of the marines had pistols, but they could not fire, lest the shots aimed aboard that violently rolling ship should miss and strike the lieutenant.

It was a moment of anxiety and horror.

Before any of the sailors could go out and reach him, Bart could easily accomplish his murderous intention.

Only from aloft could an effective shot be fired.

"Quick, marines!" roared their officer, "and pour a volley down upon the scoundrel!"

But none of the marines, except Marvil, had yet passed under the top.

The latter personage was now crawling on his hand and knees out on the slippery mizzen-gaff, about sixty feet above Bart and the lieutenant, there below him, on the boom.

The lieutenant, to avoid the axe in his enemy's hand, had glided along the foot-rope to the extreme edge of the boom.

"You won't escape me!" howled Bart. "I know I'll be hung for it, but I'm going to kill you! I'd sooner die than be flogged!"

So saying, like an evil serpent, with death in his stern eyes, he crept nearer to his intended victim.

Then the horrified lieutenant, dropping from the boom, hung on to the end of it by means of the rope gear twisted about it.

Bart drew still nearer. With his right foot on the foot-rope and his left hand on the boom, he raised the axe on high, above Somers' head!

At the same moment, the ship's stern going far down in the hollow of an enormous sea, the lieutenant's legs, as he hung there from the boom, were buried in the water to his knees.

Too proud to plead for mercy from his vile foe, his pale visage and glaring eyes yet betrayed the natural fear and horror in his heart.

"Hah! hah!" exultingly shrieked Bart. "It's no use! You are a dead man!"

Then, bending his head far back, as the wretch above him was leaning still further over that he might bury the axe deep in his brain, the lieutenant, with his wild eyes turned up to the gloomy clouds, uttered one long, despairing cry, which those who heard it could never forget.

"Oh, God in Heaven! save me for the sake of my child!"

That was his last appeal.

And, hearing it, Marvil, on the mizzen-gaff, had resolved, even at the peril of his own life, to rescue the lieutenant who had so befriended him.

To disengage his musket from his back and fire it now must result in the young marine's being thrown from the gaff of the pitching ship!

Nevertheless, without hesitation he quickly unslung the piece, and, as Bart's axe was about descending upon the lieutenant's skull, he fired.

Down went the axe, falling into the sea, and after it pitched Bart, headlong, with a bullet through his brain.

As he had expected, Marvil's letting go of the slippery gaff to fire his weapon, caused him to be thrown from his lofty perch.

Down he went falling into the sea, even before the eyes of Somers, who had now swung himself safely upon the boom and was laying in toward the stern.

But while all the sailors on deck thought Marvil was lost, he was hauled up from the ocean by the mizzen topmen, one of whom had thrown the noose of a long rope he had previously prepared over the head and breast of the marine as he fired.

There is little to add.

Lieut. Somers thanked his gallant preserver again and again, and the lieutenant of marines said to the brave youth:

"An ensign's commission for you, my lad! You are an honor to my corps!"

A year later there was a wedding in Valparaiso, and Lieut. Somers was the happiest among the guests.

The bridegroom was Ensign Marvil, now wearing the becoming uniform of his rank.

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